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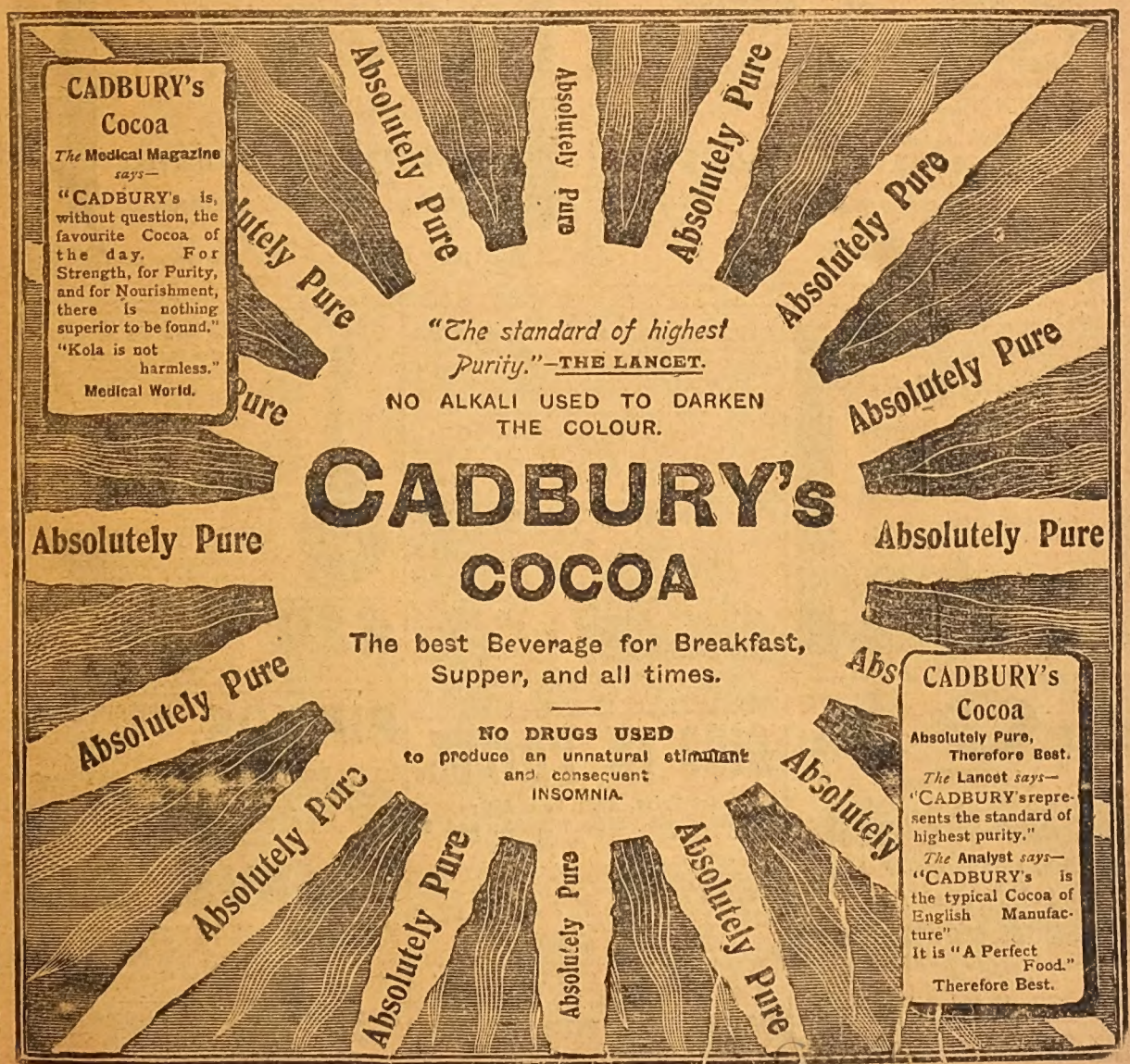
SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 511. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 15TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.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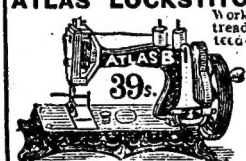

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SHORT STORIES

No. 511. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending October 15th, 1898.

THOSE WHO FOUGHT AT OMDURMAN.

No. 3.—Bugler of the 12th Soudanese.

THE SHAWL WITH THE TORN CORNER.

THE evening express was swinging along the Great Northern line, carrying its usual quota of sleepy passengers and valuable luggage.

Suddenly there was a queer rocking kind of motion; a lurch, a flying of gravel against the windows, a horrible grinding of wheels, and a sudden halt, which effectually awoke the passengers and scattered the luggage promiscuously.

"Fire-box of the engine has dropped," called out the guard, in the same careless tone in which he announced the last station; but he condescended to add, reassuringly:

"No danger, ladies—only a delay of a few minutes."

Of course, all the gentlemen—with womanly-curiosity—flocked out to inspect the damage, while we ladies gave long sighs of relief at escaping what might have been a serious accident, and began talking as if the incident had introduced us.

We were only three in number; a motherly old lady, a young married woman, and myself—a girl whose girlhood was almost in the past tense; for I had past from my teens into the twenties, and was the last unmarried member of a wealthy county family.

Like a spoilt child whose chief delight is to run off to the neighbours, my greatest enjoyment lay in travelling hither and thither, with or without pretext, just as fancy willed; this time it was a letter from a friend, inviting me to visit her and help her plan her wedding-trousseau, which had proved the all-powerful magnet.

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Though scarcely half-way to my destination, I had already planned trousseaux enough to supply all the society brides of that season; but now—who can continue the same train of thought when once grossly interrupted?

The old lady was too flighty and talkative to suit me, but the younger one was very pleasant, and we chatted like old friends.

Before the accident she had been deeply engrossed in a novel, and seeing her finger its pages caressingly, I was wise enough to plead sleepiness and excuse myself for a nap.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "that jacket does not make a good pillow, let me lend you a shawl!"

And with several dexterous movements she adjusted it beneath my head, smiling sweetly, and went back to her book.

Instead of sleeping, as a well-regulated young lady should, I stared about, or idly twisted the fringe of the shawl.

A scent of wild roses came from its soft folds, and I quietly smiled my approval of the owner's taste, for the wild rose was my choice of all perfumes, and I had used it since a mere girl.

I lifted my head to readjust the shawl, and how familiar it seemed—soft and grey, with long knotted fringe, just like one I had had many years.

I nestled down again, and fell into a train of reminiscences; how my great-aunt had brought it over the sea, how it had saved my life in a storm, and how our pet dog used to play with the fringe. Yes, and one day he got angry and bit a piece off the corner!

Involuntary I turned the shawl over, and there—wonder of wonders!—one corner was torn in precisely the same way. Could it be that this was my shawl? Surely mine was in one of the attic trunks that—no I remembered distinctly; it was among the articles that our chamber-maid stole last year.

Then I pondered slowly over that event, recalling our surprise and dismay, when, one morning, not only the new servant was missing, but many small valuable things; the India shawl for one—making a motley array, and no doubt a larger one than we ever realised. The same night she disappeared the bank had been robbed of thousands of pounds and some silver which had been placed in the vault for safe keeping. The authorities were quite positive that the theft had been committed by one of the under book-keepers; but a year of skilful detective-work had failed to trace his whereabouts, and the people of the town had well-nigh forgotten the occurrence.

There was a strong conviction in our family that the book-keeper and our chambermaid had left by the same route, and that, could one be found, the other would be easily brought to justice also.

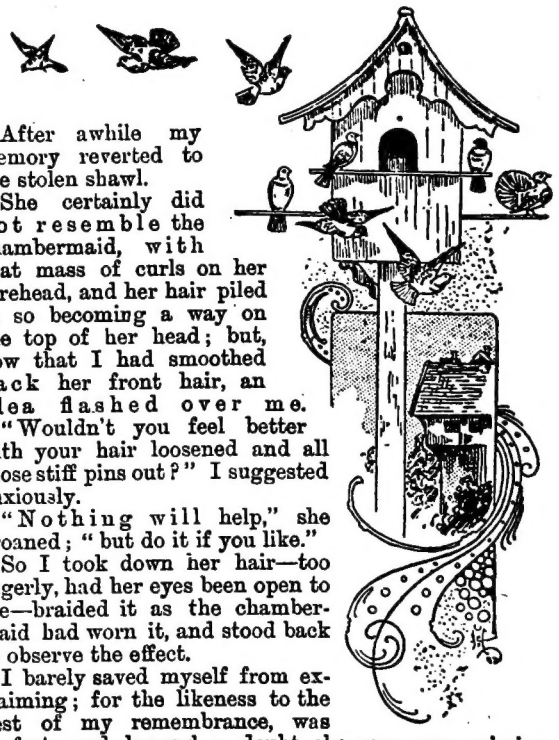
As I pondered, the idea grew stronger that I had stumbled upon one of the stolen articles; for did not the wild-rose scent proclaim it—the torn corner, and even the knots in the fringe testify to it?

The owner—I turned to scrutinise her, and saw her lying down, her book on the seat, and a look of intense pain on her face.

"One of my miserable headaches," she said, in answer to my query; adding wailingly: "and I haven't a thing to stop it!"

"Let me dampen a handkerchief to lay on your forehead! It might aid you," I asked.

She seemed so ill that I stood stroking back her hair and trying to charm away the dull pain by magnetic touches.



After awhile my memory reverted to the stolen shawl.

She certainly did not resemble the chambermaid, with that mass of curls on her forehead, and her hair piled in so becoming a way on the top of her head; but, now that I had smoothed back her front hair, an idea flashed over me.

"Wouldn't you feel better with your hair loosened and all those stiff pins out?" I suggested anxiously.

"Nothing will help," she groaned; "but do it if you like."

So I took down her hair—too eagerly, had her eyes been open to see—braided it as the chambermaid had worn it, and stood back to observe the effect.

I barely saved myself from exclaiming; for the likeness to the best of my remembrance, was perfect, and beyond a doubt she was our missing servant.

But I must have more proof to bring before a court. Besides, the gentleman with her might prove to be the book-keeper—whom, alas! I had never seen—and by keeping still I might ferret out the greater criminal.

There was no danger of losing their company, for our engine was too badly broken to admit of reaching a side-track, and we must wait for aid. Presently a gentlemen entered, swearing half-audibly.

"Oh, here is James!" my invalid exclaimed: "let me introduce you, Miss——"

"Miss Warren, of Brighton," I supplied, purposely taking to myself a fictitious name; but the "Brighton" slipped out correctly, and caused my tongue an awful bite.

"My husband—Mr. McCord, Miss Warren," my acquaintance said, and, bowing, we began conversation with the useful phrases.

He was a good-looking man, but his eyes seemed always in the act of opening widely, which gave him too alert a look. He had caught at the word "Brighton," and saying that he used to live there "a long time ago, when a mere boy," he asked endless questions about the changes that had taken place.

I became loquacious: told him, among other things, that none of the new buildings surpassed that of the Bank—"the bank which was robbed last year, you know."

"No! Is it possible? When was that?" he exclaimed, evidently to lead me on.

So I launched into the sea of falsehood without compass, sail, or oar, knowing not whether I was working for or against myself, only knowing that I had aroused an intense interest in my companions, and hoping to secure some clue.

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The detectives were still at work, I said, and it was rumoured that they were now on the right track, and were merely waiting for more evidence. It was an outrageous fib, but the chance of frightening him was too good to be lost.

Plainly he considered me, from my conversation, a very simple-minded girl, for he was quite unguarded, and, in his anxiety to hear more, showed that he had not only heard of the robbery before, but had been in Brighton since he was "a mere boy."

Once more speeding on our way, we sought our berths, mine adjoining theirs. A long, wakeful night followed, in which I racked my brain in vain for a scheme that might lead to the law's success; for I felt positive that I had tracked the thieves.

When the grey dawn was creeping in, I heard whispers from the adjoining berth, finally these words:

"It may all be true. I had better telegraph to Don to hold up yet awhile; but we do need the cash!"

That was all, but it was something to go on. When the train stopped at Edinburgh, he left her to get breakfast while he went to the telegraph office. I followed, and the instant he left, went in and asked to see the telegram.

"It is not customary for us to do such a thing," the man said, coolly eyeing me with mingled surprise and contempt.

It was an audacious request, but not till afterwards did I realise fully its impertinence.

"Yes, but it is important I see it—most important! I'll give you five pounds for it!"

Stealthily glancing round to see that no one overheard, he handed me the slip, remarking, as if to justify himself:

"You mistake, there's really no importance in it. You are his wife, I presume?"

He had given me the *rôle* of the jealous wife, and I accepted it by a nod.

I copied the telegram, though he demurred greatly, handed over the money, and hurried back to the refreshment room.

To my vexation the McCords had gone.

I had understood that they were going on to Aberdeen like myself.

I waited on the platform for them to return.

I had been waiting for some time, wondering what I should do, when I was informed by a messenger that there was a telegram for my husband at the office.

I went in at once, and the clerk handed it to me with a sly remark that perhaps I would take it for my husband.

"He didn't expect an answer, I suppose," he said, "for he didn't say he would come for it."

Of course I took it—how eagerly, he never knew.

The first one was addressed to J. C. Duncan, 17, Gale Street, Brighton, and read as follows:

"Don't trade the w—— yet. It isn't safe."

The answer was:

"Have traded with an old German in Lucas Street. Safe enough."

"The w——"! What could that be? I thought long before I remembered that other valuables were stolen from the bank. Then the mysterious "w——" began to stand in my mind for a watch, and at a venture I decided to telegraph to one of the bank directors:

"Was there a watch stolen from the bank last January? If so, please describe."

His answer was:

"Yes; a large gold one, with seven small diamonds forming an 'L.' Why?"

Too excited to heed his question or think of my visit, I bought a ticket and took the first train back.

Doubtless I should have put the matter in a detective's hands; but, with all a girl's ardour, and also excited beyond reason's range, I determined to act alone. I was certain the McCords had eluded me.

The next day I was in a shop in Brighton, and the watch with its tell-tale "L" lay before me.

I secured a promise of the old Jew to keep the watch twenty-four hours, and then, seeking the detectives' headquarters, told my long story in all its details, and handed in the three addresses which had cost me so many manœuvres—that of J. C. Duncan, the McCords' home address, and that of their destination, which she had given me in our first chat.

Within forty-eight hours, in a Brighton court-room, were assembled three officials of the Bank of Brighton, Mr. and Mrs. James McCord, alias Jim Mallory, the ex-book-keeper, and Mattie Frayer, our ex-chamber-maid, J. C. Duncan, alias Don Mallory, the old German Jew, several lawyers, detectives, and myself.

The Mallory brothers struggled hard to asseverate innocence; but the case became too strong, and they confessed, accepting the inevitable decision with stoical resignation.

Not so did "Mrs. McCord," whose conduct for a time was violent.

The shawl will be handed down to our family as an heirloom; and though all this happened years ago, the scent of the roses clings to it still.

T. K. L.

He: "Are you sure I am the only man you ever really and truly loved?"

She: "Perfectly sure. I went over the whole list only yesterday."

Jack: "What did you think of that cigar I gave you yesterday?"

John: "Not much. It cost me sixteen shillings. How so? Why, it gave my wife the idea that the gas was leaking somewhere, and she sent for a plumber."

Mr. Figg: "I see that some man with a fondness for figures has estimated that if all the babies born in 1890 were placed in a stack, 8ft. square at the base, it would over-top the Eiffel Tower. What do you think of that?"

Mrs. Figg: "I think that a man who could talk that way about babies is nothing but an old brute."

At a reception Mr. Evarts was once drawn into a discussion between two ladies.

"Mr. Evarts," said one, "do you not think I am right in saying that a woman is always the best judge of another woman's character?"

"Madam," replied Mr. Evarts, "she is not only the best judge, but also the best executioner."

Mrs. Hoon (looking up from her newspaper): "Mercy me, I have just been reading an account of an anatomist whose house was packed with skeletons, and who had a paper knife which he used for cutting comic papers which he declared was made from the funny-bone of his first wife. I cannot believe any man capable of doing such a thing as that!"

Hoon: "Neither can I. There never was a woman who had a funny-bone."

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HOMESPUN YARNS.

By Levin Carnac.

V.—THE WHITE FEATHER.

A LOG-BUILT house in a remote gorge of the British Columbian mountains is not exactly the place in which one would expect to find complete suites of handsome furniture, overmantels, Liberty curtains, and art-china suspended by wires on the polished, match-boarded walls and stood about on pretty brackets and crewel-fringed shelves.

Yet it was only a few summers ago that I found myself a guest for a fortnight's shooting and fishing in just such a house, furnished in just such an incongruous fashion. I had met my host down at Victoria; the rendering of a small service on my part had led to a better acquaintance, and that had resulted in an invitation to go with him into the hills and have a taste of sport in the wild North-West.

It was on the evening of my arrival that I learnt the chapter in his life-story which I am about to set down here.

"You've made yourself a remarkably comfortable nest out here in the forest primeval; but if you'll excuse my saying so, it looks to me rather to have been built for a pair than a single bird."

My host's brow clouded for a moment as I spoke, and I was beginning to fear that I had said what had been better left unsaid when he reassured me by replying with a short laugh that had more pain than fun in it:—

"Yes, you are right. And as a fact it was built for two, and there would be two or more in it now if the greatest mercy that has ever befallen me had not come to me in the shape of what I then thought the greatest misfortune that could befall a man."

I didn't like to ask for the story, much as I wanted to hear it, for there was evidently a tragedy in the background; so I was well pleased when my host leant back in his easy chair, nodded towards a framed cabinet photo that stood on the centre shelf of the overmantel, and said:—

"That was the girl. Get up and look at her, and then I'll tell you the story. It'll help us through the evening anyhow."

I looked and found it the portrait of a very pretty girl of about twenty. A girl with just the face to drive a man half crazy with its saucy, tempting beauty. Beneath the glass at the foot of the photo was neatly pasted a tiny white feather, and just as I was going to ask why it was there my host said:—

"I see you notice the white feather. Well, that's the key to the story, so now you can sit down and listen.

"I've been out West for nearly fifteen years, and, as things go, I've done very well. Years ago I won a lot of then almost worthless shares in a copper mine at poker, and for the last ten years that mine has been a gold one to me. Then this timber estate has panned out very well, and altogether I am, though I don't look it, a rich man.

"It is just three years back this spring that some business connected with the purchase of the range on the other side of the valley took me to Montreal, where I had located the owner after a considerable hunt. While I was in the city I determined to stop a few weeks and look round, for it was my first visit east since I had left Ottawa as a boy of sixteen. I had been at my hotel for a week and had done all my business, and was beginning to get sick of town life, when one afternoon in the vestibule I ran up against an old chum whom I had known out here five years before. He had been even more fortunate than I had, and was just off for a trip to England to see the old folks at home. Half an hour later he had persuaded me to go with him, and in two days we were on blue water steaming eastward.

"We had a very good time in the old country. My chum introduced me to his people, and they invited their friends to meet us, and so it came to pass that I met Maggie Jeffries, the original of that photo—and then the good time became a glorious one, for I fell in love with her at first sight, and before very long found out that all the love was not on my side.

"The upshot of the matter was that I proposed, was accepted and formally engaged, but Maggie's father, who was really very much attached to her, insisted that at least six months should pass before we were married, and after some disputing on my part it was settled that I should return here and set my house in order, and that Maggie should come out to me at the end of the stipulated time.

"When this was all arranged Maggie made a suggestion which took my fancy immensely. She proposed that I should buy the furniture for our backwoods home in London, and that she should help me to choose it. For the next fortnight we were as happy as two lovers with plenty of money to spend could well be. Maggie had very good taste, and as I was in no humour to spare the cash we got a very pretty little fit-out—as you can see from the remains of it. At last it was all bought and packed up ready for shipping over, and I said a fond farewell and took passage in the same boat that brought it.

"I needn't try to tell you what loving pains I took in fixing up the outlandish home that was to be the scene of the first few years of our married life. I was determined that the house should be as cosy and comfortable as money and work could make it, and so I went at it with a light heart and counted the days until the letter came that was to tell me to go to meet and marry my bride.

"At last it came, and I started off across the continent, feeling—well, if you've ever been in love yourself as badly as I was, you will know without my telling you, and if you haven't it's no good thing to tell you.

"I put in the necessary residence at Halifax, and was ready armed with the license by the time the steamer came in. I went out to her in the pilot boat the happiest man this side of the Atlantic and came back the most miserable wretch that the sun of that summer's day shone upon.

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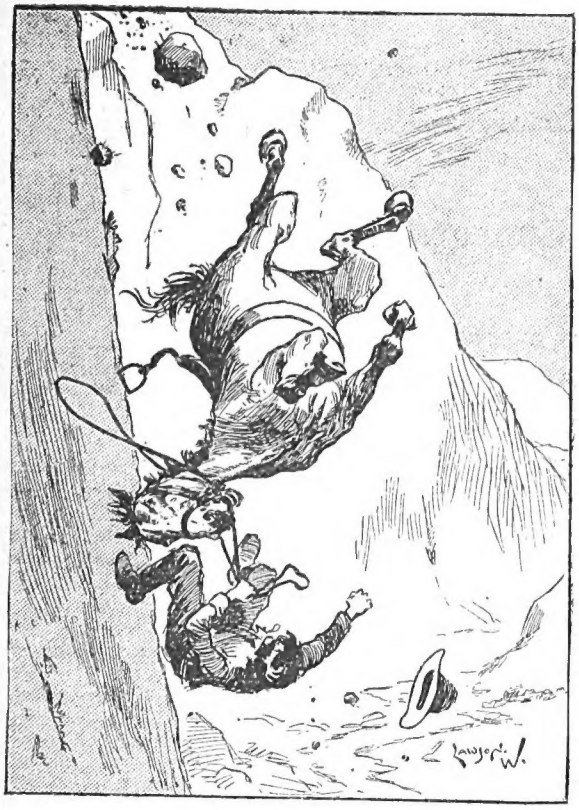

His horse slipped on a rock ledge, and carried its rider over a hundred feet sheer into the cañon below.

"Not to dwell longer than I need to on what is still to me the most painful part of the story, I will just say, in as few words as may be, that the girl I had trusted with the happiness of my life had sold herself to a higher bidder during the brief interval of the passage from Liverpool to Halifax.

"The man who had out-priced me was a vulgar, flashy millionaire, who had struck oil in Pennsylvania, and after a miserable scene with me, during which she first tried to excuse her fickleness, and then broke down and cried, and implored me to forgive and forget her and live to be happy with someone more worthy of me, and all that sort of rubbish, I started back West, sad and angry and soured with all the world, and she married her oilman and started off on a tour through the States.

"When I got home I felt fit to set fire to the pretty little home that I had prepared for her with so much pains, and burn up everything that reminded me of her, but common sense prevailed after a struggle, and I set-to to conquer my misery by hard work instead. As time went on my heart softened towards her a bit, and I even came to take a sad sort of pleasure in the furniture we had chosen together in the Old Country.

"When a couple of years had passed the wound had healed again, and I was getting pretty contented once more, when one night, after I had settled down to my book and my evening pipe, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs outside, and then a loud knock upon the door, and a voice which said:

"'We have lost our way among the hills, and shall be very grateful if you can take us in for the night. We will pay well for the accommodation if you will oblige us.'

"I threw the door open, and by the light of the lamp that still burnt in the passage I recognised the man that Maggie had married in preference to me. I swallowed the left-handed blessing that rose to my lips, and asked who was with him. 'My wife,' said he, and the next moment I was outside helping Maggie off her pony.

"Of course I took them in, and gave of the best that I had in the house. Maggie had put on experience so fast that she treated the meeting as a mere matter for polite surprise and pleasure at meeting an old acquaintance. I thought differently, but I knew enough to hold my tongue, and I did. I even took a savage sort of pleasure in watching Maggie's queer expressions as she recognised one after another of the pretty trifles she had helped to choose.

"At last I was evilly gratified to see the surface ice of her artificial training melt into tears under the influence of the old associations. Her husband was out of the room at the time, and my gratification was quickly changed into a fiercer emotion when she turned to me with her pretty eyes brimming over, and sobbed out:

"'Oh! Jack, how I wish these were mine now. I am *so* miserable.'

"Before I had any time to shape a reply her husband came back, and we went into another room to supper, and as soon as that was over Maggie went to bed complaining of fatigue, while her husband settled himself to a struggle with the whisky bottle. I soon saw that the man was a perfect brute, an animal in every respect but sobriety. Maggie might well be miserable.

"After two hours' hard drinking the whisky beat him, and I helped him to stagger to the door of his bedroom, and returned, sad and disgusted, to think things over. I suppose I must have dozed off in my chair, for I woke up with a start, feeling a pair of soft arms round my neck and a kiss trembling on my lips. I cannot tell you what was said during the next half-hour or so, and, if I could, it wouldn't be right.

"Let it be enough to say that I was tempted to the last limits of an average man's endurance by the pitiful story of my old sweetheart's wrongs and sufferings, and her passionate plea to be released at any price. I believe I was just on the point of yielding, when she whispered a few fierce words in my ears which, in an instant, froze the hot blood that was boiling in my veins, and turned all my lawless, re-awakening love into horror and disgust. Without a word I cast her from me, and left the room with her last words, 'You coward! you are not worthy of me!' hissing in my ears.

"That night I dreamt that Maggie stood by and smiled on me as I flung her drunken husband into the mill-race, and the next morning I was off to the woods before they were up.

"I never saw either of them again; but what Maggie tempted me to do happened all the same, for within the month I received by post a cutting from a Victoria paper detailing a fatal accident to a gentleman travelling in the mountains alone with his wife. His horse had slipped on a rock ledge, and carried its rider over a hundred feet sheer into the cañon below. Both were killed instantly. I knew enough to feel convinced that the 'accident' was probably, if the truth were told, a case of murder.

"The cutting was pasted neatly on to a piece of scented notepaper, and underneath it was tied with a true-lover's knot of red silk that little white feather."

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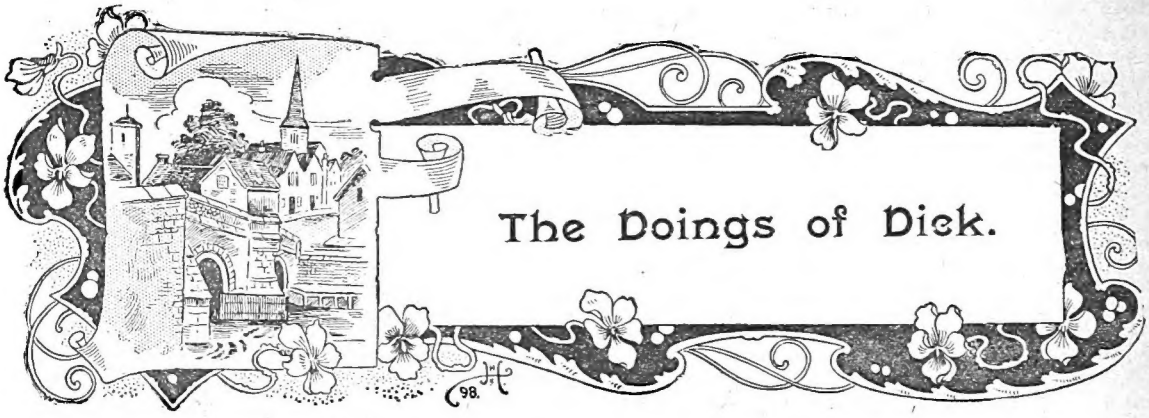

The Doings of Dick.

It was the autumn of the year; we had all many studies for future use.

At that time Jules and I shared a studio, and Dick occupied the adjoining one.

Jules and I were on rather cool terms with Dick just then, for he had entered our studio, like a thief in the night as we remarked—though it was really in the afternoon when we were both out—and had "borrowed" our lay figure.

I had tried to induce Jules to leave town for a holiday. This was the day before Dick stole the lay figure.

Jules would decide nothing, however, just then, and we did not see Dick; it was not until after his unspeakable treachery that Jules agreed to go.

"We will hasten from a place tainted by that man's presence," he said to me, "and on our return we will remove to some secluded spot where he will seek for us in vain."

I did not share Jules' indignation to its full extent; in fact, had Dick not taken a new half-pound tube of white of mine at the same time as the lay figure, I should have felt quite friendly towards him; still, it was clearly impossible to anticipate a pleasant time, with these two fellows perpetually quarrelling. No, it would be more peaceful to go away with Jules alone. I could always sit on Jules when we were alone. So we decided to go to a little fishing village on the Norfolk coast where I had stayed once before.

It was agreed that we should start in two days.

Nothing was to be said to Dick.

Judge, then, of my surprise, when we entered the station on the day in question, to behold Dick.

I turned to Jules.

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked, white with rage, of which, however, with masterly self-control, I allowed no trace to appear.

Jules feebly affected surprise, and said he "did not know; perhaps Dick was not going by our train."

I knew now that treachery was afloat.

How much longer would I go on trusting these two with my guileless heart?

It only wanted Dick's words to make all clear.

"Hallo, Arthur, my dear and attached friend!" he said. "Surprised to see me, eh? You see, Jules came to me yesterday about the lay figure, and accused me in round terms of taking it without permission. I told him how astonished I was, and how you had said I might have it any time I wanted it; and then Jules explained your mean behaviour, and told me of your plan of going away. He said he could not leave me after all that had occurred, and I consented finally, yielding to his persuasion, to accompany you. You know I bear no malice, so you've only to say you're sorry, and we'll forget the past."

I was boiling with rage; but I held my peace.

Jules had whispered while Dick was talking—

"He's sold a picture, and is taking down a dozen of cham. with him."

I merely mention that to show Jules' disposition. Determined not to do things by halves, I forced myself o smile genially, and holding out my hand to Dick, I said:

"Well; to tell you the truth, old man, I was a bit surprised to see you. Jules told me you could not possibly get away, as you had some work to finish, and, judging by the absence of my flake white, I felt I had corroborative evidence."

"Oh, the white; that was not for myself. Jones dropped in and asked me for some, and I sent him round to your place. I am surprised, though, that he should have taken it in your absence. Not a gentlemanly thing to do, I must say!"

I felt it was no use. Natures such as Dick's, where the moral qualities are almost dead, are adamantine in their hardened iniquity.

At the end of our railway journey we found the trap we had ordered waiting to convey ourselves and our luggage to the village five miles away. Dick was delighted with every inch of the scenery, and extolled its quaint, unusual, un-English character at every turn.

Presently, as we approached the village, Dick and Jules were surprised to find that the peasants recognised me and touched their hats; that the farmers nodded, and the occupants of a sumptuous landau, an elderly gentleman and a young lady, bowed to me as we passed. I had not told them that when I stayed at Miversham before it was with a relative, who was at that time rector of the parish, and that through him I knew everyone.

Dick said:

"Why, you never told us you knew anyone down here. Who were the people in the landau?"

"Oh, only Lord Miversham and his daughter, Lady Juliet; he's the lord of the manor, you know," I replied, with nonchalance.

Jules pricked up his ears.

"The Earl of Miversham?" he said. "Why, he's one of the biggest picture buyers in England!

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Jules was essentially aristocratic in all his views and feelings, Dick decidedly radical.

I now enjoyed my triumph to the full.

Jules wished to make the acquaintance of Lord Miversham, because, as he said, the Earl might buy his "Psyche."

Dick was anxious to know him, in order to persuade him to convert his estate into a co-operative farming company, renounce his title, and speak on socialism in Hyde Park.

He said an Earl stumping in Hyde Park on a Sunday would be useful to the cause.

I gave them both to understand that I could not take the initiative, but said that I should call at Miversham Court, and if Lord Miversham chose to include them in the invitation to dinner which I was sure to receive well, of course, they could go, that is, if they had brought their dress clothes; I had. They had not, and they banded together to abuse me.

Arrived at last at our inn, Dick and Jules both expressed themselves delighted with their quarters, and again and again commended me for inducing them to come to Miversham. I was amused with Dick: I had not induced him at all. We had a bottle of champagne, and they drank my health, and expressed, in the warmest terms over the whisky, later on, their appreciation of the sterling qualities I possessed.

I hate to say anything against either Jules or Dick, but I must set it down here, that some time afterwards, when they were friendly, they made a great joke out of what they said that night; and would say that the serious way in which I "swallowed their blarney and replied to it was too delicious!" I tell them not to be ashamed of the one good, generous action of their lives, even though it was under the influenced of—but, no! I will not betray them.

The next day I had to show them round; of course, we did not expect to do any work for two or three days. As we were walking through the village I met Dr. Sinton, whom I knew very well. He was delighted to see me again; asked me to introduce him to Dick and Jules, and said he would be pleased to see us whenever we could drop in at his place. During lunch I spoke of Dr. Sinton and his daughter Cicely, mentioning, in a casual way, that when I stayed at Miversham before, she was an extremely pretty girl. Jules and Dick both thought it would be pleasant and civil, to call at the Doctor's that afternoon.

"Rather bad form to drop in the same day we were asked," I said.

"No, my boy," said Dick, "you see, Dr. Sinton's introduction to us may be regarded as a call, and in foreign courts it is the custom to return a call upon the same day. Now, we may be recognised as foreigners here, so we shall be only right in following the usages of the best society."

I was annoyed at Dick airing his knowledge; I did not, of course, believe in the truth of his information, but Jules was gazing admiringly at him, as much as to say: "That's up against you, Arthur! What a lot Dick does know!"

"I did not imagine, Dick, that a person of your Spartan radical views would frame your conduct on the example of an effete aristocracy!" I retorted.

"Don't talk rot; of course, while the world remains in its present condition of ignorance, a wise man must assume its imbecile habits and customs," was Dick's remark.

So it was decided we should call. And we did.

Cicely Sinton was at home, and was, of course, pleased to see fresh faces. She was delighted, too, to see me again; but with feminine deceit concealed the fact so well that neither Dick nor Jules perceived it. Jules was not much attracted by her; he admired dark women just now, and Cicely was divinely fair. But Dick? Well, I blushed for him. He started at once, and neither Jules nor I could get a word in.

The conversation during the Doctor's absence (he was called away to see a patient) consisted of this:

Dick said: "Miss Sinton, how happy you must be in this sweet spot, far from the madding crowd with its million of squalid by-ways. For my part, it is the ambition of my life to dwell in some such fair Arcadia, and attune my whole soul to the song of the nightingales!"

Cicely said: "Well, do you know, I'm sure you'll be disgusted to hear it, but I love London, and long to be in its bustle and life. Existence in the country saddens me."

"Yes," said Dick, "I could see that you had the grand free spirit of the modern life, that laughs to scorn the musty mediæval yearnings for rural simplicity, a simplicity that exists only in the febrile brains of the minor poets."

"But," said Cicely, "I thought you but now professed a love for the country?"

"Yes," said Dick, "I am universal, and love all things in degrees; but my chief love is for the beating pulse of some mighty city—the cradle of civilisation, the hive of the universe!"

Jules and I exchanged glances, but felt it would be ill-bred of us to expose Dick; and Cicely seemed quite satisfied with his equivocations and mixed metaphors.

The conversation now turned to music, and Dick, who had about as much ear for music as a Bactrican camel, and whose favourite melody was "Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-Ay," gravely assured Miss Sinton that Bach's fugues afforded him exquisite enjoyment; that he could read the mystery of Wagner's great modernism, and that Mendelssohn might be likened in music to Wordsworth in poetry. Poetry and painting passed in review before them, and even politics were lightly grazed.

The Doctor had come in during the latter end of all this; and had glanced inquiringly at us when Dick had given vent to something more than usually idiotic.

I had a few words with Cicely before we left; I reminded her of the happy time I had spent at Miversham before, of how well she and I had got on together at tennis; and hinted that existence since that time had been grey and gloomy. I always considered it impolite not to tell a girl that her absence obscures the sunshine; it pleases her and it does not hurt me. I also apologised for Dick's erratic oratory; but here she stopped me quite fiercely, and remarked that Dick was one of the cleverest and most universal men she had ever met.

The next day I decided to call at Miversham Court, and Jules said he would just stroll up with me, so we started. As we neared the great grey Tudor pile, which had been the home of the Mivershams for so many centuries, Jules' enthusiasm positively glowed.

Jules was in the midst of an eloquent discourse on the pride of descent, including his own history, when we arrived at the Court. We learnt to our annoyance that the Earl and his daughter, Lady Juliet, had left for town the previous day. I was disappointed on Jules' account; and began to express my sorrow, but instead of taking what I said in the right spirit, he insinu-

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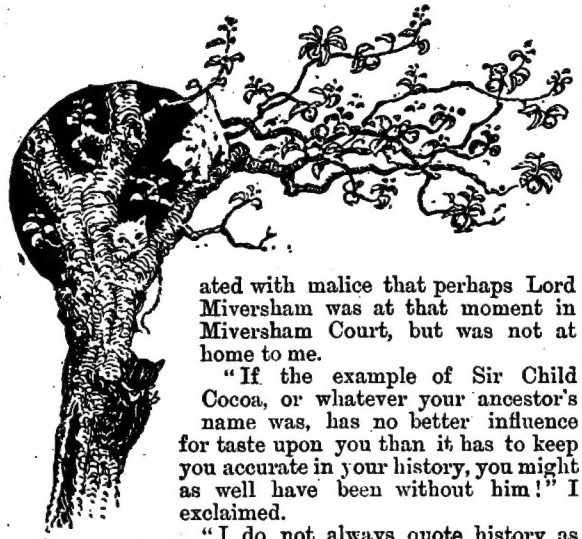

ated with malice that perhaps Lord Miversham was at that moment in Miversham Court, but was not at home to me.

"If the example of Sir Child Cocoa, or whatever your ancestor's name was, has no better influence for taste upon you than it has to keep you accurate in your history, you might as well have been without him!" I exclaimed.

"I do not always quote history as you learnt it in your school books" (I agreed with him cordially), "but as it stands recorded in the archives of our family!"

I suggested that he alluded to the Newgate Calendar, and we walked back in silence.

Presently we came to a meadow overlooking the back of Dr. Sinton's house, and we beheld a solitary figure pacing solemnly up and down, with eyes cast upon the ground, and anon raised to a window of the Doctor's house.

It was Dick.

He did not see us, but continued his meditative posture all unconscious of prying eyes.

Jules suddenly forgot my remark anent his family archives.

It had indeed only been a small revenge of mine, for Jules used at one time to lead the conversation round to pigs, and when he arrived there he would turn to me and say—

"And talking of pigs, old man, how are your people?"

Jules, I say, forgot my remark, and nodding knowingly in the direction of Dick, he winked meaningly at me.

"It is a case," he said, "a bad case; we must do all we can to prevent this for the sake of the poor girl, Arthur!"

I agreed with Jules; I thought it would be a sad and solemn thing for me in the future to have to bear the reproaches of Cicely's broken-hearted father—when Dick, having married the girl, would take to drink, and sink lower and lower towards poverty and vice. Yes, we must unite in this common cause and rescue the still unsuspecting Cicely.

Dinner-time arrived, but no Dick.

We dined, Jules and I, and had a bottle of Dick's champagne.

Dinner ended, still no Dick.

We began to grow anxious, and had serious thoughts of going out to look for him, when Dr. Sinton's boy came round with a note addressed to both of us. I opened it and read:

Dear Arthur and Jules.—Happening to meet Dr. Sinton quite by chance at 6.30 this evening, he prevailed upon me to dine with him. Of course, I demurred, fearing you would miss me, but the Doctor was so pressing he would take no refusal. Solacing myself with the reflection that both of you were blissfully happy in your toadying flunkeyism at Miversham Court, I yielded; but sad to relate, as I was rising from the table I was suddenly seized with one of my old attacks of cramp, and found myself unable to move. Dr. Sinton did all he could for me, but the pain was so intense, every time I put my foot to the ground, that, in short, I'm going to accept the spare bedroom here for to-night. Send my things, and don't weep for me. No need for either of you to come.

Dick.

We stared at each other in stupid amazement.

"Old attack of cramp!" said Jules, "must be so jolly old, he forgot even to mention it before!"

"Stay at Dr. Sinton's," said I, "when he's only ten minutes' walk from here!"

"At any rate," said Jules, "it would be unfeeling, if he is really bad, not to go and see him. We should reproach ourselves eternally if he never got over it!"

I agreed, and dismissing the boy, we collected the raggedest and worst of Dick's things and walked over.

We found him reclining in an easy chair by a cheerful fire in the dining-room, with the suffering (?) limb extended upon a low chair. He was smoking one of the Doctor's cigars, and talking in low tones to Cicely, who sat near him with an anxious look on her sweet face.

The Doctor had been again called out.

We rushed up to Dick and began expressing our sympathy.

"Forgive me, Miss Sinton; in the horrible racking anxiety for our old friend I had almost neglected an apology for our intrusion. Dick, my dear Dick, how are you? Is it dangerous? You must be careful, and above all not smoke!" So said Jules.

"No, Miss Sinton," I broke in, "pray do not let him smoke. When he has had these attacks before we have been told to keep everything away from him. He is not allowed wine, or cigars, or——"

"Arthur is right," said Jules, "he must be kept in a darkened room—padded, if possible—and left severely alone. In this lies his only chance!"

Cicely, who did not appear so pleased to see us as I should have expected, now became terribly concerned.

"My father did not seem to think the case so bad as you say; in fact, he said that so far no virulent symptoms had supervened, but that the patient must be kept quiet," she said.

As for Dick, the workings of a suppressed rage on his features—a rage he dared not in the least betray—had the effect of making him like some ghoul who strives to appear like a good angel.

"Really, Miss Sinton, Arthur and I could carry our poor friend back most carefully, and it is a shame to impose an invalid upon your hospitality," continued Jules.

Cicely would not hear of this, however, so I said:

"At least let us relieve you of the task of nurse. We will remain with him turn and turn about, and so release you from the trouble and responsibility."

I don't know what would have been the outcome of this, for Dick was fast degenerating into a frantic maniac, and had already reached down towards the heavy brass dogs in the fender. Luckily a diversion was caused by the return of the doctor.

Cicely seemed surprised. "Why, how soon you're back, papa. I thought you were called to the Freestones at Amperton?"

"There appears to have been some mistake, my dear,"

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replied Dr. Sinton. "I met Maurice Freestone before I was halfway there, and feared he had come to hurry me and that it was a serious case. He, however, was smiling, and asked me where I was going. I told him I had been sent for, half an hour before, to attend to his father, who had had a fall from his horse.

"Maurice said: 'Oh, it's a hoax, Doctor; there's the guv'nor coming down the road,' and, sure enough, there he was. I inquired of Robert" (the Doctor's boy), "and he says he was told by Brown's boy down in the village, and that Brown's boy was spending a shilling in ginger beer and chocolate creams at old Mrs. Choople's shop. I can't make it out at all, unless it's the work of that villain Smalldoes, the German quack homœopathic, who's trying to get my practice away."

Jules and I registered a mental oath that we would interrogate Brown's boy, and felt that his revelations would only justify our suspicions. Yes, it was a black and deep-laid plot, and what could we do? To actually betray Dick would be to bring down the wrath of the Doctor upon me for introducing so vile a character to him and his daughter.

The Doctor asked me if I had seen Dick under a similar attack before.

"Yes," I replied, "he is very liable to them, and they are unfortunately of long duration. The doctor who attended him last said that six weeks would be about the minimum of the next attack, but that he could be moved with safety within twenty-four hours after the seizure, so I thought that next day at the latest we had better send for him; he could be carried home on a door!"

"It is a very peculiar and interesting case," Dr. Sinton said. "I can find no swelling and no tendency to inflammation, and this confirms me in a theory of my own that in cases of approaching tentanus, which frequently arise from latent paroxysm of the gastric nemius, no symptoms of any kind are manifested; and, in fact, it is by the entire absence of them that a diagnosis may be arrived at."

I said: "As you say, Doctor, the absence of symptons is conclusive."

The Doctor at first seemed pleased, but, recollecting that he was bound to assume I knew nothing about it, he said—

"Not always, I assure you, but in the present case, certainly."

Jules and I saw that, at any rate, Dick was booked there for one night; so all we could do was to sit close to him and talk incessantly, thus effectually preventing him from exchanging whispers with Cicely, which he had been doing all the time the Doctor was talking to me.

We reluctantly rose to go at length.

We said good-night effusively to Dick, and repeated to the Doctor (when we got him in the hall) what the specialist whom Dick had consulted before had said about his not being allowed to smoke or touch stimulants, and then we departed gloomily to the inn. It was impossible to think of work while we had this terrible responsibility on our shoulders.

As soon as we had finished breakfast next day we started for the Doctor's, feeling exhilarated at the thought that to-day at least, we would set matters to rights, and if absolutely necessary drag Dick back even to town with us.

You can imagine how exasperated we were, then, when we were shown into the Doctor's small consulting room, and not into the dining room as before.

The Doctor entered presently.

"Your friend is no better this morning, but I feel sure he is not physically worse. He has, however, become somewhat excitable and hysterical, a very common phase in his complaint, and cannot bear to see anyone except—er—myself or my daughter. He even shows signs of impatience when I enter the dining-room!" So said the Doctor.

"We are both deeply grateful to you for your care and kindness," I returned, "but I assure you when he is like this, to humour him too much is apt to prolong the attack. The special——"

"Pardon me," interrupted the Doctor, somewhat piqued. "I am, I feel confident, as capable of treating a case of this sort as any man."

Jules and I quite agreed with him in our own minds, but did not say so. Presently we came away and did not begin to employ bad language until well out of sight and hearing of the house. Then Jules burst forth.

When we had cooled down we began to make plans.

"Suppose we send an anonymous letter to Dr. Sinton describing Dick's character?" I suggested.

Jules the Bayard, the chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*, the descendant of the valiant and immaculate Childe Kau, affected to be shocked at this.

"No," he said, "I could never condescend to an action that was not straightforward, manly and open. I propose," he went on thoughtfully, "that we listen to Dick's conversation with Miss Sinton, hidden behind those laurel bushes—we can very well hear, because they have a fire and the window open; then we will bribe Brown's boy, who seems open to corruption, to tell Robert, who will tell the Doctor, who will question Dick, who will get moved on—eh, what d'ye think of that?"

There seemed to be something in this; at any rate, it was worth finding out how matters stood before we took any decided action. So I agreed with Jules to try the laurel bushes.

We had lunch, and drank to Dick's confusion in some of his own champagne, then we started upon our errand of mercy.

Taking a roundabout way, we skirted the meadow at the back of the Doctor's house; and stealthily, with movement like the subtle savage on the war trail, we crept nearer and nearer, till at last each found himself hidden in the shadows of the two huge laurels that flanked the dining-room windows.

My attention was caught by a crumpled piece of note-paper on the grass.

I picked it up, and smoothing it out, discovered it was covered with Dick's handwriting—it was, in fact, the rough copy of some lines addressed to Cicely. I never knew before that Dick was guilty of this species of self-indulgence, and any lingering leniency I might have felt towards him took wings and flew as I read the lines.

I ground

my teeth as I came to the end of the effusion and was about to tear it into small atoms and scatter them to the four winds, but on second thoughts I put it in my pocket. The murmur of voices began to reach my ears, and I could distinguish Dick's speaking in low tones. Presently Cicely spoke.

"But do tell me, Dick, all about your life with your two friends; of course, I know something about Mr. Arthur—and will you be angry if I tell you something?"

Dick declared that nothing she could say would anger him, and she went on:

"Well, Dick, I don't like him; he has a most objectionable habit of patronage and finality about his own remarks, don't you think so?"

Dick said: "As one of my oldest and best friends, I feel I cannot speak against Arthur, so I will content myself with admitting that what you have said is no more than the truth, and that, as a matter of fact, he is, without exception, the most argumentative, dogmatic, and at the same time ignorant and objectionable fellow it has ever been my lot to meet with—unless it be Jules, who has all Arthur's faults and none of his good qualities, supposing Arthur to possess any."

Jules and I had had enough of it; we felt that we were too late.

We stepped stealthily away and joined each other as soon as we were out of sight of the house.

Whatever our thoughts may have been just then we did not express them.

Each felt that collaboration had been a failure; we must play the game now, as Jules would have said, being an enthusiastic if incapable cricketer, "off our own bats."

As for me, although Cicely had gone down in my estimation through her manifest preference of Dick to myself, I felt that this would not have been the case had I given her any encouragement.

I merely regarded her somewhat disparaging remarks about me to Dick as a woman's subtle flattery.

Of course, I knew Jules would not be likely to take my philosophical view of the case.

He would resent Dick's treachery to the end, and would never forgive Cicely her remark about me, his friend.

No, I would say nothing to him of my altered views, for to Jules the man who changed his mind was not a philosopher, but a vacillating and weak-minded person.

The remainder of that day we spent in friendly fashion, carefully avoiding all reference to Dick.

We talked of what we should do the next day, and explained that we had seen some subjects, and we were most eager to commence work.

At twelve the next day the prodigal returned.

He wore a look partly truculent and partly nervous.

He limped as he approached us, until he read the looks exchanged between Jules and myself, when he relinquished that effort.

"Well, you fellows, I'm much better, sudden improvement, could not trespass any more on the Doctor's kindness. Real good fellow he is, too!" he said.

For a moment we were silent, then we said in a breath, "How is Miss Sinton?"

Dick blushed. (Yes, it's the truth!)

"I believe Miss Sinton is quite well," he said. And another silence fell upon us.

Then Jules asked lightly: "Doctor been called away lately?"

"Scandalous trick of Smalldoes," said I.

"I hear Brown's boy is very ill, suffering from an overdose of ginger beer and chocolate creams, and that he has made some sort of confession to Dr. Sinton," remarked Jules.

Dick began to fidget in an uncomfortable manner, but he said nothing.

Then I began to talk about poems and quoted some of Dick's effusion.

"You unmitigated sneaks!" he said in a rage; "you underhand, contemptible, contumacious jackals! You two vipers, whom I have nourished only to plunge your poisonous fangs into my heart, and trample my simple faith beneath your boots! When have you known me to commit a deceitful action? When have you found me aught but honourable and true? I have done with you both! Go, leave my presence! The very sight of you disgusts me with humanity. Go!"

It was then that my nobility of character came in and averted a catastrophe. I said to Dick:

"All you have just said to Jules is, though perhaps too bitter, scarcely more than the truth. I deeply regret the part I have played in yielding to his persuasion and playing the spy to some extent upon your actions; yet I have the consolation of knowing that I besought Jules, with tears in my eyes, to destroy the beautiful lines he became possessed of in some way unknown to me, and not to profane those words of love by reading them in the wrong spirit. No one can be more rejoiced than I at the happy result of your *ruse de guerre*. Let me, my dear Dick, be the first to offer you my most sincere congratulations."

Dick was delighted. To have me in his camp set his heart at rest about the future, for he did not forget that Dr. Sinton might come to me for information when he came to know the state of affairs between Dick and his daughter.

As for Jules, stunned by Dick's attack, flabbergasted by my position, his brain was in such a whirl that it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to join me in congratulating Dick.

And thus through my diplomacy, tact and benevolent sympathy for human failings, we three were once more united.

Dick is engaged to Cicely now, with the Doctor's consent. But somehow, I don't think Cicely likes Jules or myself very much. Can Dick have told her anything? If I thought he had I'd—No! I wouldn't!

H. P. Lacey.

Amateur Scientist: "Can you explain to me the reason why so many people become insane?"

Guyer: "The answer ought to suggest itself. They have no reason."

"When I asked my wife to marry me," said Feltt, "she did not answer. Silence gave consent."

There was no reply, and Feltt added:

"Since we have been married, though, she does not express her sentiments that way."

Tradesman (to old gentleman who has purchased a lawn mower): "Yes, sir, I'll oil it, and send it over imme——"

Customer (imperatively): "No, no, no! it mustn't be oiled! I won't have it oiled. Mind that! I want noise! And, look here—pick me out a nice rusty one. My neighbour's children hoot and yell till ten o'clock every night, so—(viciously)—I mean to cut my grass from four, till six every morning!"

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A Premature Proposal.

IT was early May, and two were walking together in the Elysian Fields.

To see Lizzie Robinson, to exchange ideas with her, to discuss theories of life, to tell all that had been in his mind in the past, and almost all that he hoped for in the future, was at one time the chief necessity of Frank's existence.

What she felt in return was his ever-recurring problem.

She liked him, of that he was certain. A dimple showed near her lips whenever he approached her, and her eyes rested on him as if they had found what they had been seeking.

Often he was pervaded by a soft intoxication of belief that she waited for him; that his coming was the signal for the real interest to begin. Oftener still, he was depressed by the conviction that her sympathy for him was purely a matter of curiosity; that she was trying to read him as she might read a book, and that, when she reached the last leaf, she would throw him aside.

The girl seemed to him to feel no vital need of any friend, any helper.

Her instinct was—freedom.

To-day he had chanced to encounter her near her home, and had asked if he might speak to her a moment.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and at the same time took three steps away from him.

He then passionately blurted out what he had never meant to utter until the right moment came, and by every sign this was the wrong moment.

"Having said so much," he went on, "I must say more; I ask you to be my wife."

"Oh," said Lizzie again, a sense of outrage implied in her look and tone.

He took one stride and reached her. He laid his hand on her arm.

"Do you hate me?" he demanded.

"Hate you? Why should I hate you? Not the least in the world."

"Do you love me?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Then," said he, "I will go away. If you will not love me, the world itself is not wide enough for you and me."

Their eyes met, and she was frankly amazed at the signs of trouble in his face.

"What nonsense!" she cried, with scorn. "We were friends, we are friends, we can go on and be better friends."

"Lizzie!" he exclaimed, with fresh impetuosity. "Friends? You do not seem to know what the term can mean. Only as your husband can I be your best friend."

She shrank from the word.

"Nothing could induce me to marry," she cried.

"If you like me as a friend," he persisted, with vehemence, "why not as a lover, a husband?"

"I do not like you at all, at this moment, simply for thrusting such a word upon me. I feel you to be a tyrannical personality towering above me, trying to govern me."

"You would hardly, here and now, care to have me go down on my knees. But in heart and feeling I am at your feet, Lizzie. Honestly, if life is to be worth anything to me, I must have you in it. There is a vacuum in my existence; I ask you to fill it up."

"No, no, no," said Lizzie. "I am very much interested in myself," with a brief laugh. "I intend to give myself free play and see what I can make of my life. I have all sorts of schemes. I intend not to marry."

He drew a long breath as he spoke. He averted his eyes; he bit his lip.

"Schemes in which I have no part," he said heavily. "Well, I wish you all happiness, Miss Robinson. But no—I will not be insincere. I can't wish you to be happy without me. The day I become purely disinterested I shall suffer less than I suffer at this moment."

Then saying: "I must bid you good afternoon," he walked rapidly away, while she entered her father's house.

Lizzie could hardly gather her thoughts together. A thousand words she had been ready to utter to Frank burned in her heart, and her tongue was stiff and stubborn.

It had all been so sudden; he had been so impatient.

She had altogether been taken by surprise, and felt that she had not made her case clear. She was conscious of a tumultuous rush of sensations.

A fortnight passed, and she heard that he had gone abroad.

She could not at first believe that he had deserted her. What had she said, what had she done, that he should in a moment renounce the pleasant intercourse which had become their habit? Yet, when she recalled his words, his tones, his glances during that interview, she was no longer inclined to be angry; in recollection, they gained new efficacy—she was thrilled as his meaning became magnified and intensified. Then, conscious that she was softening, she would cry: "I must be wise, strong, consistent, true to myself!"

All these three months that she had known Frank she had been conscious of a sense of power. How

insidious his influence had been, flattering her that she was free, yet all the time imprisoning her in meshes which, light as gossamer though they might be, she found it hard to throw off. For she was obliged to confess that, now she no longer saw him, although she was to all appearance leading the life she had hitherto led, the interest had flatly gone out of it; it lacked the central moving figure.

She would never think of him again. Then, having decided never to think of him again, she went on thinking of every word he uttered—of the general why and wherefore—of things tangled, which might have been smooth—of what is, compared with what might have been—until the fifteenth day of May, on the evening of which day she was to appear at Mrs. Fabian's ball.

The night was warm. Lizzie was dressed in white, and looked airy and girlish. A murmur ran round the room as she came forward.

Suddenly she flushed. The truth was that Lizzie had caught a glimpse of Frank standing in a corner of the room, and for a moment everything had whirled round before her eyes.

He approached her as she stood surrounded by a group. Her eyes met his with conscious meaning.

"I had almost forgotten you," said Lizzie, saucily. "It is so long since I have had the pleasure of seeing you."

Later, when she was following Mrs. Fabian to her carriage, he came up.

"Why not walk home?" he said. "The moon is full, the night is like summer."

"I am going to walk," Lizzie said to Mrs. Fabian. It was a pleasure snatched out of the very teeth of loss and loneliness to see him.

"Please take my arm," he said. "I want to monopolise you for a moment. I sail for America to-morrow at three o'clock."

"I heard you had already sailed."

"Without bidding you good-bye? Hardly."

"Ah!" murmured Lizzie.

Let her struggle as she might to vie with him in high spirits, Lizzie was conscious of a lack of rebound. He evidently considered everything rounded off, complete, finished, dead. He looked at her with an eager expression when she did not speak.

"Well?" he said presently.

"You see," she observed with an effort at lightness, "that I supposed you were half way across the Atlantic, that you had gone without a word."

"Did you care particularly? But no—I will not press questions. Still, I wanted to snatch just one moment. We are at least friends. You yourself said that we had been, were still, and could go on being friends."

He bent his head and swiftly kissed the hand which lay on his arm. She would have withdrawn it, but his own closed over it.

"This is mere friendliness," he said. "To-morrow night I shall be out of sight of land, and you will be free to go your own way."

Lizzie felt like crying out. She had quivered at his words; they were like the shrewdest irony. All of human blessedness seemed to be offered in this companionship.

Alone against the world?

Why should she stand alone? Why should she fight the world?

Conquered and despoiled, what could the world give her in return for rejecting this joy immeasureable? What childish folly for her to reject that which was the only thing she realised a clear need of?

Still, what she said was:

"I hope your journey will be pleasant."

"Delightful," he returned curtly. "Much you know of my state of mind. But you have refused me. Wretch in fetters, as I am, I must bear my pain and be silent. Is this good-bye?" continued Frank, and he took both her hands in his.

And what was the sequel? some reader might exclaim. In her reply to Frank, did the girl exalt herself in the glowing light of Love, or weakly seek shelter again under her Will o' the Wisp of Friendship?

Let us draw the curtain—and leave them in their happiness.

HAROLD MALTHOUSE.

The Pledge of a Man.

THOSE who know Cape Dolphin in the summer only, when fair winds mingle the odour of kelps with the scent of new-mown hay, and the docile sea licks the feet of the bluff like a well-trained hound coaxing his master to play, are likely to think of the fisher-folk as enjoying a holiday existence. But I, who have dwelt among these simple people from my boyhood, and have heard the dull roar of the monster, and seen the red froth upon its lips red with the blood of those who were near and dear to me, have other memories; and when the storm goads the waters to fury, my heart ever puts up its prayer for the men at sea.

And there is one storm that will ever be present in my mind. It was in 1882, and it left its trail of mourning all along the coast.

Of all the folk that lived in the little fishing village there was none (save my parents, for whom I held a due reverence) who seemed to me half so brave and admirable as Bob Finney, whose father was the master of the *Rose Marie*. We were almost of an age; indeed, I was a month the elder, yet such was the size and vigour of this young giant that he instinctively arrogated to himself the position of a superior, which I, ever of puny build and faint heart, as instinctively acknowledged.

It was Bob who cast me, a lubberly boy of fourteen, into the water, and compelled me to learn swimming, an art of which a mother's over-tender care had left me ignorant. It was he who hoisted me, struggling and howling, to the masthead of the *Lively Annie*, and it was he who thrashed Tom Taylor for doing the self-same

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thing. He was the hero of my boyish days, the staunch friend of my early manhood.

But, although we remained steadfast friends, we came to see each other less often as the years passed by. Bob was all for the sea, and could no more hold away from blue water than I could part company with my beloved books. It was this wide difference of tastes that forced us apart and sent him out into the blue horizon, while I still hugged the desk at school and blossomed from an eager scholar into a doubtful teacher.

Now, although Bob's love for the sea was as deep and broad as the sea itself, there was that in the village which held him back from long voyages and kept him knocking about in a fishing smack, when he ought to have been at least second officer on his father's brig. And that which kept him back was the love of a woman; perhaps, as Bob said, the best woman at Cape Dolphin. And so, here was Bob, beaten like a shuttlecock between the battledores of his two loves—his ingrained love of the alluring sea, and his absorbing passion for Hilda Manter—who was a woman well worth some sacrifice.

Hilda had sat beside me in the little red schoolhouse, week in and week out, for years, and I felt that I knew her much better than Bob, who was reefing and luffing in his boat. Indeed, there was a time—but I am telling Bob's story, not mine, and I can only say that I was wrong, and that Bob, at sea in his boat, had kept far closer to her than I at the next desk.

And so it was he who was in her thoughts as her eyes wandered from her book and out over the sparkling sea to where the fleet lay, a cluster of white specks on the horizon. And it was he who came at last to be looked upon as her true love, while I was counted their steadfast and mutual friend, who held the open confidence of each and listened to many a tender tale with what inward fortitude I might, but always, on the outside, pleased and proud of their trust in me.

And so it was that I knew before anyone else when these two birds were planning for the nesting. And very modest and charming their plans were, though falling short in ambition of what seemed to me right and proper. For I held that a rocky little farm, a week now and then at the fishing, and the wage of a lifeboat man—for Bob held a berth in the lifeboat—were all too little for a man who deserved a command. But the twain were happy, and Hilda wore such a light in her eyes, and looked upon me at times with such a dreamy, tender gaze, that my heart fell a-throbbing, and I went hot and cold in an instant, until I remembered that a lover loves all mankind, and it was in this general, and in no sense an individual, way that Hilda regarded me.

Now, it grieves me to the heart that I must write down aught against Bob; but I have set myself to write a true account of these matters, and, to their proper understanding, no fact must be omitted. Moreover, I hold that my dear friend emerged so strong from his troubles that a passing weakness may well be forgiven.

Bob was a man of large and generous nature, and it has fallen under my observation that such men fall the more readily into this particular weakness. Your mean and narrow soul knows not the temptation of conviviality.

Nevertheless, it was a sore blow to me when I first found him in liquor, loud and boastful before the inn door. He fetched me a buffet when I rated him, which I did, perhaps, a thought too roundly, there being others present. He was ashamed of it afterwards, and begged my pardon humbly enough when he was sober; but, for all that, he dropped more of his wage at the bar than a decent man should. Hilda noticed it, I felt sure, though she said never a word; but the town gossiped over it not a little.

And so matters went on from bad to worse, until one night there came a stiff nor'-easter, and a great ship drove bow on upon the rocks. The men of the lifeboat station got the crew safe off the wreck; but it was fearful work, and they were short-handed, Bob and one other lying drunk and sodden in the public-house.

I met him next morning when he was in that savage mood that follows a debauch.

"Bob," I said, walking close up to him and standing face to face, "you're a bigger man than me, but you're a villain, and so I tell you."

For a minute I thought he would have thrown me from the cliff into the sea, as he had done in boyhood, but in far different mood. His face grew white, and his great hands clenched tight. But he only said—

"Not another man here would dare say that to my face, John."

"But I dare," I retorted angrily. "Do you remember Jerry Watson, the scandal of the village when we were boys? Well, you are the Jerry Watson of to-day. Take care that you don't die as he did—drunk, and face down in shallow water."

"You take a deal upon yourself," sneered Bob. "You milksops always do. A man has but to take a glass or two, and you are down on him with your cant. When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it; until then, keep it."

"A glass or two, indeed!" I cried. "You lay like a sot in the tap-room while better men than you risked their lives in the boat where you belonged. No thanks to you that the crew of that wrecked ship don't lie awash in the surf to-day. I thought better things of you, Bob Finney. Think of your family, man—think of Hilda."

He took a quick step towards me then, and made as if to strike me down, so that I threw up my hands to ward off the blow, when round the corner came Hilda herself, her soft eyes widening in alarm at our fierce attitudes. Bob swung on his heel, and went to her at once.

"Hilda," he said slowly and heavily, "will you turn against me? I was discharged from the crew to-day for drunkenness, and here is John Ladd, of all others, casting me off with scant ceremony and no loss of time."

Before Hilda could answer I had my say, which was not much, and tapered weakly off because of what I read in her eyes.

"That is not true, Hilda," I began with heat. "I do not cast Bob off. But I do say he lacked much of manhood last night, and that I was ashamed for a man of his stock to lie like any tramp in the gutter while his mates took their lives in their hands, as brave men should when need comes. And I say, too, that it is little love and less respect he shows to you, and that he is not worthy to——"

But Hilda held up her hand to stop me.

"That will do, John Ladd," she said, with quiet dignity, laying her hand in Bob's. "And I think it is very ungenerous of you, who have always been Bob's friend, to talk so. But what you say and what others say will make no difference to me, for I love Bob Finney,

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and am not the woman to thrust him down when I should raise him up. There is not his equal for manliness in the whole country; and I will marry him and save him, let people think what they may."

And with these brave words and a scornful glance at me, she slipped her arm through his and the two went off, her head proudly erect, but Bob's hanging low upon his breast.

But though Hilda spoke bravely, and was enough of a woman to live up to her words, she had no thought to sign articles with an untrustworthy skipper, and so she told Bob Finney, as I afterwards learnt, as soon as they were out of earshot of myself.

"Bob, my man," she said, 'twas Bob himself told me, so I can vouch for the truth of the matter, although the words are my own, "Bob," she said, "you've got your work cut out for you. I'm thinking you'll be easier at the head of the house if you save yourself, than if I do it for you. I'm giving you a chance. I'll marry you one year from to-night, if we are both alive and you do not change your mind. It rests with you whether I marry a man or a sot. And I have faith to believe, Bob, that there'll be a man beside me at the wedding."

Of what Bob said I have less knowledge, but as a man in his case will promise anything, I make no doubt his answer sailed close to the wind of her wishes. But as those who have the greatest claim upon a man's love are the last to learn of his shortcomings, it so happened that the townspeople knew more of Bob's failings than ever came to the ears of the gentle Hilda.

Moreover, a man cannot bid farewell to a congenial habit without strong regrets, which even a strong will may not always overcome at once. The old boon companions are ever ready to urge, cajole, and sneer at a man who seems to set himself above them by leading a decent life. And a tithe of Bob's earnings still found its way to the bar.

And so it was that Hilda grew pale and sad of face, and the neighbours pitied and scorned her, according as their natures were soft or harsh. But neither pity nor scorn did they offer openly to Hilda. There was that in her nature which taught them better. And while she grew pale, Bob's face waxed red and venous. But just when the village had made up its collective mind that Bob Finney was past hope, there happened a thing which made him come about like an unworthy craft in the teeth of a sudden gale, and shape his course for the safe port of sobriety; no less a thing, in fact, than the great storm of 1882.

It happened in the early autumn, before people had fairly bidden good-bye to summer, and made up their minds to face cold winter. In the morning the boats set out for the fishing before a white-ash breeze, and the fishermen bobbled peacefully in their dories and sang cheerfully at their work. In the late afternoon the women-folk were huddled on the head, peering out to sea to behold the battered fleet come staggering in one by one, driven like chips before the gale.

As each boat came in, they shrieked to one another in shrill voices that seemed a part of the tempest:

"That's Sampson's boat!" "No, it's Binley's! I know it by the patched sail." "Heavens! They'll be on the rocks!" "Thank Heaven! she's over!" And then an awful shriek as one small sloop, with three men clearly to be seen, went down before their eyes.

At last the night fell, and the storm grew in fury as the night hid its deeds. The lighthouse twinkled hopefully, and the wretched women kindled great fires on the beach and crouched beside them, waiting for the dawn. None who wore the long night out, as I did, on the open beach, can ever forget the horror of it all.

It was just past two in the morning when a gun was fired out there in the storm, and a rocket went flashing athwart the black sky. Then we knew that a ship was on the rocks, with but one chance in a thousand that she would hold together until morning came, and the crew, if any were then alive, be brought ashore.

It seemed worse than useless to launch the lifeboat in the darkness and in such a sea, but the crew could not hug the driftwood fires and wait for daylight while men's lives were being beaten out by the surf. So, with infinite labour and much loss of precious time, the Lyle's gun was hauled to the point nearest the wreck, and an attempt made to throw a line across the hulk. And all this time those on the wreck kept burning signal lights and firing the minute gun.

I well remember how, as the line was thrown again and again, and each time fell short, the hardy men about me, their faces white in the light of torches, clenched teeth and hands, swearing deep-throated oaths; and once, when a sudden flare of light aboard the wreck, more brilliant than most, showed us the poor fellows clinging fast to the rigging, I saw the capt in bury his face in his horny hands, and sob like a little child. Then, turning to his mates, he shouted hoarsely:

"Boys, the gun's no use. We must try the boat or let 'em go under. All hands to man the boat!"

And with a quiet "Aye, aye, Cap'n," these men turned and tramped sturdily back to face death.

There was a wail among the women when the boat was run out, but the men thrust them quietly aside, and as the grey dawn was turning all faces ashen, they ran her out through a smother of white foam, and were swallowed from sight in the rush of waves.

To those who watched her as she was thrown greedily from crest to crest, as if the mob of famished waves were wrangling among themselves for this choice morsel, it seemed as if she buffeted an endless time. Yet I have no doubt she had not struggled a quarter-of-an-hour with the sea, when it cast her back again, reeling and helpless, with two men and the captain lying stunned across the thwarts.

As we gathered stupidly round the half-drowned men, I became conscious of one that elbowed his way through the throng with masterful purpose. It was Bob, his face set and determined.

"Men!" he cried, "we must try it again. There's no time to lose. Run her out again and give those poor fellows a chance!"

But though, indeed, all could see that the men dropped from the rigging one by one, like ripe fruit, no man stepped forward to man the boat. It looked like certain death, and the men were cowed.

"Will you come?" roared Bob, "or will you stand like curs and let good men drown?"

Then, as they still stood like clogs:

"You won't?" he cried. "Then I'll bear a line to them myself! Stand you by to pay it out! You can do that at least!"

And with that he began hastily to knot a light line about his waist and coil it down free and smooth, while the others crowded about him and sought to hold him back.

"Stand off!" he cried. "I'll show ye there's a man yet in Bob Finney's skin!"

But I had read of such another scene, and could not bear to think of Bob throwing himself away, and I was about to cast myself upon him when Hilda stepped

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calmly to his side, and, drawing down his face to hers, kissed him before them all.

"Now, let him go, if you will," she cried, turning scornfully upon us. "He's a man. Go and skulk by the fire and let him drown, you that have held yourselves above him! Fine men you are, and I hope you'll die in your beds of old age, with the shame of this day's work black upon you!"

Now, whether she meant all this, or whether it was a shrewd play upon our manhood, I never knew, but it worked well. I felt the blood rush to my face, and a force quite beyond my control thrust me into the circle where those two stood alone, and I said:

"I'm for the lifeboat, Bob!"

He looked at me with a strange and wholly cold expression in his blue eyes.

"You were always a lubber at the oar, John," he said.

"I can steer," I retorted hotly.

"Let him go, Bob," cried one, and so many thrust themselves forward for a place in the boat that Bob had but to choose his men.

Now, in the telling, it seems a long wrangle, but we had the boat afloat again ten minutes after she was cast ashore, and the men were pulling, strong and steady, for the wreck.

"No hurry," said Bob; "save your strength; it's a hard pull."

The men lay to it with a will, and I held her head well up into the wind, taking the waves bow on and expecting each one to smash us like a toy.

The boat was awash with icy water, and a driving sleet froze stiff on our oilskins. We rose on the crest like a cork, and dropped into the trough like a rock, with a thud that was like to open every seam. But we could see that we were nearing the wreck, and Bob seized a heaving-stick and prepared to let fly a line into her rigging, where her crew might make it fast.

"Heaven grant they're not frozen stiff," said Bob.

But when the line fell among them, as it did at the second trial, it was plain to see that they were beyond all power to help themselves, and, such as were not dead, frozen fast to the ropes. Twelve men they were, and death stared them in the face. A groan went up from the lifeboat.

"They're gone!" cried one. "Heaven help them!"

"We'll help them ourselves!" roared Bob. "Lay her close under the bow, John, and hold her while I jump for the chains. It's a chance, and I'll take it."

Once more he knotted the line about his waist, and without a word I put her where he said. It was a desperate chance. The great ship was pounding on the rocks, and likely to part amidships at every blow.

The green waves fell away from her shining, black hull, until she towered above us like a cliff, then whirled us aloft so that we seemed about to drop upon her deck. Not one among a thousand picked men would have dared to leap. But Bob watched his chance, and, all encumbered as he was with ice, succeeded.

Once in the rigging beside the half-frozen men, his deft seaman's fingers soon rove a whip, and one by one, with infinite care and danger, ten of the crew were lowered into the boat. She was by this time loaded far past the danger mark, and the wreck showed every sign of breaking up. I called to Bob to leave her, but my voice was lost in the roar of the wind and sea. Yet, like an answer came his signal to cast off and pull ashore. But the men held to it with set teeth and I beckoned frantically for him to save himself. His only answer was to cut the whip away and lash himself beside the others in the shrouds.

There are those who have blamed me that I put the boat about and left him there to what seemed certain death. But the lives of us all were at stake, and we were many while he was but one, and he remained of his own foolhardiness. Besides, as any landsman can see, I was powerless. But I take notice that those who blamed were not of the lifeboat crew—nor did Hilda blame me a whit. That I can swear to, having it from her own lips.

Once ashore with the rescued men we turned and ran her out once more, which does not look as if we were cowards, leaving a brave man to his death. I had little hope of the wreck holding until we reached it, and less of taking the men from her, if she did; but I should have held myself no better than a cur if I had not made the attempt.

Our task this time was harder than before, the men being weary and the water even rougher. But at last we lay close in the lee of the wreck and threw a line over her at the first attempt. There were now but two men in the rigging. Bob and one other, the third having been washed away while we were gone. It was not long, therefore, before we had them in the boat, Bob coming down last.

It is a marvel that we ever came ashore. Indeed, one poor fellow was swept away, and my exhaustion was so great that I seemed to have no command of the steering, and we were once almost broached to in the trough of the sea.

But, somehow, we at last felt the keel grate on the beach, and knew that we were safe.

It was a rare sight to see those rugged fisher-folk seize Bob Finney in their arms and swing him aloft upon their shoulders! And I saw more than one woman go up to Hilda and kiss her, as if she, too, had done some great thing.

And when we were come to the nearest house, and such of us as could crowded in for shelter and food and warmth, and the hot grog was going round, it was Bob who pushed the untasted liquor from him, and going up to Hilda, kissed her heartily, full on the lips. We all knew what that meant. It was a pledge, and Bob has kept it like a man.

FREDERICK WHEELER.

Have You Tried for One of Pearson's Fivers?

If you haven't, then you should surely do so at once, for, if it should so happen your name has been selected as the recipient, you would feel pretty sad when the news came to you that one of those crisp £5 notes had been lying in the editorial safe waiting for you to apply, and that you were not going to have it after all because of your indifference.

Pearson's Fivers are distributed under the following conditions: Ten names are selected every week from various sources—the names not only of householders, but of lodgers and soldiers and sailors. These names are written on envelopes in each of which is placed a £5 note, and the notes are dispatched on application.

Can anything be more simple? Do not lose the opportunity of making £5 for the sake of a post-card.

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A Head for Business.

The head master of the High School heaved a sigh of relief when he knew that Allan Poynter was not to return after the holidays. Allan was one of the best scholars in school, but his great fault was a mad passion for betting, and he used such good judgment, derived from a careful consideration of all the factors, that he was enabled to spend double the allowance that his rich father gave him every month.

Many were the remonstrances that the father had given his son on the habit, but the young man would invariably try to end the argument by asking his father which he thought was the worse—betting on a horse race or wagering on the rise and fall of the wheat market, and as John Poynter was one of the most reckless (and yet most successful) members of the Stock Exchange the father would dismiss the subject with the statement that speculation on "'Change" was considered highly respectable, while wagering on sporting events was resorted to mainly by the lower element of society. This reply was considered unanswerable by the father, but was not at all convincing to Allan.

So well had the younger Poynter stood in his studies at the High School that his father had hopes of the future showing his offspring to be a very learned scholar, and young Poynter, it was decided, should be sent to a clerical training college which was presided over by the Rev. Dr. Jessup, an old boyhood chum of the London broker. The rigid rules of the college would preclude young Poynter from any large development of his ruling fault.

Allan would have preferred going into business in the city, and had entertained strong hopes that his father would introduce him to the bulls and bears on "'Change." He had even told his father of his ambition, but the elder Poynter had mapped out his next four years differently, and disappointedly the son obeyed the wishes of his father.

So when the autumn term opened Allan appeared at the college to begin work. Allan went to the sanctum of the head of the institution and gave a faint knock at the door.

"Come in," said a kind but stern voice.

Allan turned the knob and walked into the presence of about as benevolent-looking a man as he had ever laid his eyes upon and for a moment he wavered in his determination to do something that would bring about his dismissal. "I think I have run up against a hard job this time," was the thought of the young man, when he had mentally surveyed the learned scholar before him.

"Good morning. Take a seat. Wish to see me?" said the Doctor.

"Yes sir. My name is Poynter, son of John Poynter, of London. I believe he is an old friend of yours."

"What! John Poynter's son! I am certainly glad to see you. How is your father?" and the Doctor cordially shook the young man's hand.

"Very well, I thank you, sir. Here is a letter from him," and Dr. Jessup opened a sealed envelope, took out its contents, and read the following:

My Dear Old Friend Jessup,—This will introduce to you Allan, who, I have determined, shall be trained for better things than city life. I have entrusted him to you that he may be brought up in a more straight and narrow path than he has been in the habit of travelling. I warn you he has one great fault. He possesses a perfect mania for betting, and it does not make any difference whether it is on an international yacht race or a hop, skip, and a jump. I am in hopes that he will gradually wear this habit off during his course at your school. Don't let him bet, and if you hear of his staking any of his money secure the same by all means and return it to me. I will curtail his allowance to that amount. I think between us we ought to be able to teach the boy a good lesson.

Your old friend,
J. Poynter.

"So you are going to enter college?" frowned the Doctor.

"I believe that is the sentence imposed upon me," said Allan, who had been watching what effect the mysterious letter would have on the great educator.

"Well, sir, I suppose you know that our rules of government are quite strict?"

"I think that was one reason why I was sent here," said Allan, rather unconcernedly.

"Well, I assure you that while they may seem strict to a young man in the habit of roaming about a large city at his will, we exact nothing but what it will be for your own future welfare to live up to.

"Your father intimates that you are given to betting. Under no circumstances can we allow this here. You will understand that."

In the meantime Allan had moved nearer to the open window to get some of the fresh autumn air. He beheld in the grounds outside a handsome young lady of about his own age, and was paying more attention to her than to what Dr. Jessup was saying. In fact, he was making quite violent exertions to attract her attention.

"What in the world are you undergoing those contortions for?" asked the Doctor, who had noticed the desperate efforts of the boy.

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"A decidedly charming bit of femininity," said Allan, as he pointed out of the window.

The head of the institution glanced out and saw that the "charming bit of femininity" was none other than his own daughter.

"Sir," said he, the blood rushing to his face in his indignation, "do you understand that that is my daughter? How dare you talk so lightly of her? I have half a notion of sending you back to your father."

The words uttered caused an idea to flash rapidly through the brain of the young man, and he proceeded to execute it. It was a daring one, but he must take his chances to succeed in what he had undertaken. "I'll bet the old fellow has an awfully tender spot in his heart for her. I'll probe for it," he thought.

"Why," said Allan in a half-apologetic tone, "I was simply admiring the young lady. You wouldn't mind introducing me? I have taken a decided fancy to her."

"You—you have taken a fancy to my daughter! What do you mean?" almost thundered the Doctor. "If it were not for the fact that you are the son of my old friend, whom I would hate to offend or be obliged to explain to, I would have you ejected immediately from my room."

"Now, don't get excited," assured the boy. "Let us talk reasonably. I am a respectable young man—and as your daughter glanced up, I think she looked as if she would be decidedly willing to meet me. Now, don't get angry," continued the young man, as the Doctor jumped to his feet and pointed to the door.

"You are the most audacious young man I have ever seen. You certainly act more like a person fit to be sent to an insane asylum than a religious college. You are positively impudent. What's the matter? Have you been drinking?" asked the Doctor, growing more and more indignant all the time.

Then Allan played his trump card.

Said he:

"Let us talk mildly. Now, to convince you that I have made no mistake, or that I think I have not, I am willing to wager twenty pounds that if she comes in here she will acknowledge before you that she is quite enraptured with me, and is in fact willing to embrace me."

"Why, you conceited ass! you impudent young scoundrel! leave this room immediately," cried the reverend gentleman.

In the meantime Allan had taken from his pocket-book two bank-notes, but thinking it was all over with his plans started to leave the room, wondering how he could explain to his father.

Just then an idea struck the Doctor, who reasoned thus: "I will wager the amount, win the money or pretend to, return the whole of the young man's wager to his father with the recommendation that he deduct it out of his allowance. In fact, John Poynter suggested that in his letter. It may teach the young man a lesson to have to go through the year on a curtailed allowance. Surely I can trust Evelyn." And then aloud he said, just as Allan had reached the door:

"But wait a minute. Have you ever spoken to my daughter?"

"I have never seen her before in my life."

"Suppose I should make you this wager, would you swear that you would never say a word about it to anyone?"

"I give you my word."

"Remain here a minute," and the principal went to the window and called his daughter. The young lady entered the room.

"Evelyn," said her father, "have you ever seen this young man before?"

"That young man?" came a sweet and innocent young voice. "Why, never, father. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind now," and as the daughter looked about her in wonderment, the Doctor turned upon the impudent young man and said:

"I will accept your wager. I have twenty pounds in this drawer," and he proceeded to count out the correct amount. The Doctor knew he was not doing exactly right, but had faith in the ultimate result. None the less confident of the termination, as far as his plans were concerned, was Allan.

"Who will be the stake holder—your daughter?" asked Allan.

"Agreeable," asserted the other, and each handed the money to the astonished young lady.

"What in the world does all this mean, father?" she asked.

"It means, my dear Evelyn, that this young scoundrel bets that you have become so infatuated with him that you would be even willing to embrace him. Tell him that you would not."

"Why, have you both lost your senses? Surely, father, I do not know the young man, and you know I would do nothing of the sort!"

"I'll give you three minutes to change your mind," spoke up Allan, who was commencing to feel more like smiling at the situation than any time since he entered the room.

And he pulled out his watch and commenced to count off the minutes.

"One minute." (A wait). "Two minutes," said the young man. (Another wait.) "Ten seconds more. Do you still refuse?"

"Sir!" said the scornful young lady, who was holding her father's arm and wondering how her own father could allow her to be thus talked to.

"Well," said Allan, closing his watch, "you have won."

"Won it! why certainly," and Dr. Jessup bent down and kissed his daughter as tenderly as if she had just been saved from some imminent danger. "Leave me, Mr. Poynter; you have unnerved me," and the young man went out. In a few minutes Dr. Jessup had written off the following telegram:

"Have won twenty pounds from Allan. Will send it by post with explanatory letter."

In an hour the following answer came over the wire:

"Do you mean that you actually made a wager with Allan? Wire reply."

The doctor looked at the message and sent the following:

"Yes. Followed your instructions by retaining money he wagered."

Dr. Jessup then wrote a full explanation of the occurrence to John Poynter, and after a few days the following reply came back:

MY DEAR FRIEND JESSUP,—Innocently enough, you have lost eighty pounds for me by your making that bet with my son. A few days previous to his leaving home for your institution we became involved in an argument on the propriety of betting, and he bet me one hundred pounds that even you would make a bet if you thought you were sure to win. So much confidence in you did I have that I readily accepted the bet and acquiesced in his condition that I would not inform you of our own bet. I fell into his trap as easily as you did. You won me twenty pounds, but at the same time lost me one hundred. I have only myself to blame, and we will not refer to the matter again.

I think on the whole that Allan is better fitted for a business career, and I have written him to come home and go into the office with me.—Your old friend, J. POYNTER.

ARTHUR JOHNSTONE.

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The Tragedy of Eaton Square.

CHAPTER I.

A Strange Compact.

Colonel Eldridge was generally considered by society to be a prosperous man.

He was a widower, and lived with his only child, Maud, in Eaton Square. He entertained lavishly, was a director of more than one big company in the city, and was always to be seen at the most fashionable gatherings of the season.

Yet he was probably the most unprincipled scoundrel who ever walked either into a drawing-room or down Threadneedle Street.

The wonder was that he had never been found out.

He had often marvelled at his success himself; but now, as he sat in his library one chill November morning, he saw plainly that there was a strong probability of his being found guilty of misappropriation of trust funds, and of appearing at the Old Bailey in the guise of a fraudulent trustee.

His position certainly was dangerous.

His sister had married a rich country squire named Michael Crosmaduke, but had died within twelve months, after giving birth to a son.

Shortly afterwards Michael Crosmaduke broke his neck in the hunting-field.

In his will he had appointed Colonel Eldridge to be sole executor and trustee for the baby-boy, young Michael, until he should attain his majority.

Furthermore, the Colonel was to have two thousand a year for the education of his ward, and the remaining income from the Crosmaduke property, amounting to some eight thousand a year, was to be allowed to accumulate. By his will therefore, the Colonel would have the handling of ten thousand a year for twenty years, minus the expense of educating young Michael.

The will further provided that in the event of young Michael not living to attain his majority, the estates, which were entailed, and the accumulated income, should belong to Ralph Crosmaduke, a brother of old Michael's, who was sheep-farming in Australia.

The Colonel—then only a Major—greedily accepted the trust, and made his own plans for enriching himself at the young orphan's expense.

There were three difficulties in the way.

The first was that young Michael might die before he was twenty-one, in which case there would be Ralph Crosmaduke to settle with.

The second was that young Michael might be seized with a certain form of madness, which was hereditary in the Crosmaduke family, in which case awkward questions would be asked.

The third was, that young Michael himself might become aggressive.

But whatever his faults might be, Eldridge was a bold man.

He had won the V.C. by an act of reckless bravery, and by a very different act of recklessness determined to win a fortune.

On the chill November morning at which date our story commences, Colonel Eldridge was painfully conscious that his plans had not succeeded as well as he would have wished. It only wanted six months before young Michael came of age, and the boy's spirit had on several occasions been aggressive towards his uncle. He had been educated entirely by private tutors, who were the paid tools of Eldridge; but they had been unable to exercise much influence over a mind so full of contradictions.

He was a deep student, especially of the classical poetry of Rome and Athens. His chief enjoyment lay in the calm of bookland. Yet at times so great was the violence of his temper, the sure prelude to the madness which was the fatal base of his family, that people were afraid to approach him.

The Colonel had received a letter from him by the morning's post dated from Rome. The writer stated

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that he should be glad to spend Christmas in London, and to remain in England until his coming-of age, so that he might make himself acquainted with the business details of his property, "from the management of which," he observed, "he should soon have the pleasure of relieving his uncle." There was an allusion also to the accumulated incomes and interest, which the writer presumed would amount to about two hundred thousand pounds.

Now, the Colonel had seen very little of his ward. The presence of a young man who shut himself up in a room with his books, and was apt to have uncontrollable fits of passion, could hardly be acceptable in the house of the man of the world and his handsome daughter. Yet here was young Michael, actually on the way to Eaton Square, with the avowed intention of claiming the money of which his guardian had robbed him.

The Colonel was disturbed in his meditations by the entrance of his daughter, a handsome brunette of twenty-four, with commanding figure and faultless features.

Many people wondered that she had not married; but the truth was that, though men admired her, yet they were, at the same time, rather frightened of her. Her character may be best judged of by the fact that she had been for some years the constant companion and associate of her father.

She read attentively the letter which Colonel Eldridge handed to her.

"So we are to have this young bear with us for six months."

"I am afraid it can't be helped, Maud, but it is the end of the six months I am looking forward to."

The woman gazed searchingly at her father.

"Yes, Maud," he continued, "there is no doubt about it. For the last twenty years we have been living on Michael's money. Now it will be in his power to have me arrested."

"Surely there must be some way out of it?"

"There are two ways. One is to leave the country. In other words, to become an absconding trustee, before any suspicion is aroused, which means comparative poverty for the rest of our lives. The other is to make him marry you."

"Fancy having Michael Crosmaduke as a husband."

"Fancy being mistress of Crosmaduke Park and ten thousand a year."

"With a madman for a husband."

"Exactly, Maud. But remember that you can have the madman locked up in an asylum. When I play a deep game, like the one I have been playing for the last twenty years, I calculate beforehand every move on the board. Now, if what Poole tells me is correct, Michael's reason won't last for more than a year; you can then have him put away quietly in an asylum, remain the mistress of Crosmaduke Park and its ten thousand a year, and also gain the sympathy of society."

"Suppose Michael does not choose to marry me?"

"I cannot imagine anything of the sort. I cannot suppose that *you* can't make a young hobbledehoy fall in love with you."

"Well, when will my work commence?"

"Poole writes to me that they hope to be in London within ten days."

"Will Mr. Poole stay here?"

"Yes, if he wants to. Besides, he may be useful."

"And will insist on being well paid for his utility. However, it is too late to retreat now."

The expression on the woman's face was hard as she uttered the words. There might have been an excuse for Maud Eldridge if she had consented to ruin Michael Crosmaduke, and drive him into a madhouse, in order to save her father; but her action was dictated solely by love of self. She lived merely for enjoyment, and for obtaining the means for enjoyment. It would have been impossible to have found a more unscrupulous and more unwomanly character than that of Maud Eldridge.

CHAPTER II.

Tutor and Pupil.

There is no greater sight in the world than that of the Coliseum at Rome, as seen by moonlight.

But Mr. Arthur Poole, bear-leader in ordinary to Michael Crosmaduke, was not influenced by it.

He was smoking a cigar, as listlessly as he would have done in the smoking-room of his London club, while he waited for his pupil, who—as he, the tutor, would have expressed it—was engaged in acting an affecting and affectionate parting scene with his lady-love, amongst a lot of damp and mouldering ruins.

"I wonder what old Eldridge will think of this affair?" he thought to himself. "The lad must marry, and I suppose Nina Perugia will do as well as anybody else. The Colonel will want my assistance to help him to make terms about those back rents, and I shall be able to charge my own price. Finally, I gain the gratitude of Nina, Michael, and Eldridge. Ah, here come my turtle doves!"

Nina Perugia was a perfect type of Italian beauty; her figure and her graceful carriage betrayed the native of a southern climate. No wonder that the boy by her side had fallen madly in love with her, with all the ardour of his poetical mind.

He had seen her first at La Scala, in Milan, the birthplace of musicians. He had heard her sing, and her notes had thrilled his soul. An introduction soon followed, and *l'affaire d'amour* between the beautiful soprano and the rich young Englishman became a matter of public gossip. He followed her to Rome, wrote passionate odes to her, and beneath the shadows of the Colisæum had just implored her to become his wife. She, in return, had promised to love him for ever.

The tutor and the pupil sat up late that evening. Michael, who had always been averse to taking advice on any subject from anybody, now beseeched Poole to tell him how to act.

Should he ask Nina, and her brother, who was her only relation, to come with him to England?

Should he delay his departure, and marry her at once in Rome?

What should he do?

Poole, in spite of his sagacity, had grave doubts as to what course he should advise Michael to adopt, for the simple reason that he was entirely in the dark in regard to Colonel Eldridge's plans.

Was he in the position to attack the Colonel, presuming that that crafty diplomatist chose to quarrel with him?

Was his influence over Michael sufficiently strong to enable him to dictate whether the Colonel should be pardoned or prosecuted?

On the other hand, it was certain that, sooner or later, Michael would marry Nina, and therefore it would be better for him to accept the post of mentor to the young couple at once, rather than to give anybody else the chance of ousting him.

"Let us see the lady's brother in the morning,

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Michael. When we have learnt their wishes we shall be able to judge better."

"Nina's wishes are my wishes," the boy answered impetuously. "Why should I care for anybody else?"

"For no reason in the world that I can see, my dear boy. I only thought that you might like to tell your uncle of your intentions."

"If you mean Uncle Eldridge, I shan't bother about him for a moment. You know how shabbily he behaved to me. If it had not been for you putting me in the way of borrowing money, I wonder how we should have lived."

This was perfectly true.

Poole, considering that the Colonel's allowance was not so liberal as it might be, had introduced his ward to a certain solicitor, whose practice, though sharp, was highly respectable, since his clients belonged mostly to the upper classes. This "gentleman by act of Parliament," whose name was Nock, was only too pleased to lend Michael Crosmaduke money, while Poole thus provided himself with a weapon, with which, if necessary, he could assail Colonel Eldridge.

"Just as you like, Michael; just as you like," replied Poole, who understood his companion's temper. "I only thought it proper to mention it to you; though as you say, there is no reason why you should study your uncle's feelings in a matter which concerns your life-long happiness. No," he added, as if to himself, "it is for your uncle to seek your friendship rather than for you to seek his."

"Yes, and he may not get it when he does seek it, He has the upper hand now, but in six months. he will have no more control over me than his own valet has. With all his cunning he has been a fool, as he will find to his cost when Nock examines his accounts."

"Then you have determined to employ Nock as your family solicitor?" Poole asked quickly.

"Yes. In fact, I half promised to do so at the last interview I had with him."

Poole said nothing, but he immediately decided to take the part of his pupil, in the event of a quarrel between him and the Colonel. He also decided to see Nock directly he arrived in London.

Luigi Perugia, Nina's brother, like his sister, sang at the opera. Like her, too, he possessed the beauty of his race. His careless gaiety made him a universal favourite. For his sister he had the deepest affection, and perhaps her welfare was the only thing that he ever thought seriously about. He was smoking his morning cigarette as he pondered over Michael's offer to Nina, of which she had just told him, when Poole was announced. The two men shook hands cordially, when Poole plunged at once into the object of his visit, namely, to propose that if Nina was willing, she should marry Michael as soon as possible, and that then the four of them should go to England, where Luigi could have the satisfaction of seeing her established in her new home.

Luigi answered that his sister's wish would be law to him, but as her brother and only relative he must be pardoned if he asked about Signor Crosmaduke's position.

Poole was willing to give him every information. The only reason for hurry was the necessity of Michael and himself to return to England before Christmas.

But whatever doubt Luigi might possess. was now dispelled by the entrance of Nina and Michael. A single glance told Poole that Nina had consented to a hasty marriage. All that remained to be done was for Luigi to make his inquiries as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER III.

A Deed of Darkness.

373, Chancery Lane.

To Colonel Eldridge, Eaton Square.

Dear Sir,—I beg to inform you that my client, Mr. Michael Crosmaduke, of Crosmaduke Park, has lately been married to an Italian lady, whose maiden name was Nina Perugia. As I understand that Mr. Crosmaduke is mainly dependent upon you for the next six months, I should be glad if you would favour me with your views in regard to his financial position during that period.—Yours truly,

Richard Nock.

Grand Hotel.

My Dear Uncle,—I have just returned here from Italy. You may be surprised to hear that I am married to the loveliest creature in the world. I hope to have an early opportunity of introducing her to you and my cousin Maud. I have instructed my solicitor Mr. Nock, to write to you on business matters.—Your affectionate nephew,

Michael Crosmaduke.

Such were the two letters which Colonel Eldridge received one December morning. They contained the first intimation he had had either of his nephew's return or of his marriage.

The Colonel had certainly not provided against this contingency. He felt himself to be checkmated. He knew Mr. Nock by reputation, and was fully aware that there was no mercy to be gained from that quarter. He knew, too, from his silence, that Poole must be against him. Worst of all, he was suspected. Even that last resource of the swindler—namely, flight—was denied to him, for he guessed that he was being watched by private detectives.

Maud seldom appeared at her father's breakfast-table. His hours were too early for her. She was astonished, therefore, when her maid informed her that he wished to see her immediately in his study.

"Read there," he said, as he handed her the fatal two letters.

She took them, and read them. She understood their meaning only too clearly.

"Is there any chance of forgiveness?" she asked abruptly.

"None whatever. Poole has betrayed me. I confess that I did not think him clever enough to do so, but it appears that I was mistaken. Then there is Nock to deal with."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"In the first place I shall try to get rid of the suspicion which already exists against me. I shall see Nock this afternoon, and instruct him to draw against me to the extent of five thousand pounds. You must call at the Grand Hotel, and invite Michael and his wife to stay here for Christmas, and for as long afterwards as they like to remain. You know how to act the affectionate cousin without my teaching you. For the rest we must trust to chance, or, rather, to our own skill."

Colonel Eldridge's visit to Mr. Nock was satisfactory so far as it went. The solicitor knew that he could not insist on inspecting the trust accounts until the coming of age of Michael Crosmaduke, and, therefore, was fain to be content with five thousand pounds. The Colonel, on his part, pretended to be angry at the conduct of his ward. He dwelt on the fact that he was trustee for the residuary legatee, Mr. Ralph Crosmaduke, and could not exceed the powers of his trust. Of this, of course, Mr. Nock was aware; but the Colonel told him one thing which he did not know, namely, the hereditary madness in the Crosmaduke family. The solicitor did not feel so cer-

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tain as he had been about being repaid the money which he had lent.

The Crosmadukes were out when Maud called at the Grand Hotel, so she left cards and a cousinly note of invitation to dinner for the following evening.

The invitation was accepted. Colonel Eldridge was agreeably surprised when he was introduced to Nina. Her beauty was undeniable; the vivacity of her manner was as charming as it is rare in London society. But when he heard her sing in the drawing-room those notes which had held breathless the audiences in La Scala, his admiration was as great as his astonishment. The Colonel determined to win the confidence of his nephew and his beautiful wife. Perhaps, after all, it might not be too late.

He managed to get a few words in confidence with Michael before he left.

"My dear boy, it hurts me very much that you should be staying at an hotel when this house is virtually your own. Now, why not come here to-morrow? We can give you a private sitting-room, and you must treat the place as Liberty Hall. Say 'yes,' at once, for I don't mean to take any denial."

"It is very good of you, uncle; but I have my brother-in-law staying with me."

"Bring him with you. We have plenty of house room. Ah, Nina!" he added, as Mrs. Crosmaduke came on the scene, "for I shall take the privilege of an uncle and call you by your Christian name, I have just persuaded Michael to bring you and your brother here, instead of your staying at an hotel. We shall expect you, to-morrow, shan't we, Maud?"

Maud seconded the invitation, and so it was arranged that Michael, his wife, and Luigi Perugia should take up their abode in Eaton Square on the morrow.

Mrs. Crosmaduke came on the scene.

The Colonel's manner changed immediately his guests had gone. He beckoned to his daughter to follow him into his study.

"The girl is superb," he said brusquely. "It remains to be seen whether she is as clever as she is beautiful. I suppose this brother will be a thorn in our sides. What did you think of Michael?"

"He is less of a cub and more of a madman than since I last saw him."

"What do you mean? Don't speak in riddles."

"I mean what I say. There was a curious sparkle in his eyes, and an unnatural ring in his laughter, a nervous twitching in his fingers as he handled his knife, which made me shudder. Now that I have seen him again, I swear to you that I could never marry him. I would not be in Nina's place for all the wealth of the Indies."

There was a ring like the ring of a hammer upon steel in the voice of Maud Eldridge, as she uttered the last words.

The Crosmadukes and Luigi Perugia arrived on the following day on their visit of indefinite length. Christmas passed, and the bells rang the old year out and the new year in, without anything occurring to disturb the ordinary life in Eaton Square. There was only one thing which made the Colonel uneasy, and that was that he could gain no tidings of Arthur Poole.

It was not till one evening in the second week in January that Michael betrayed any tokens of his unmanageable temper. Nina had offended him by singing a favourite song of the Colonel's instead of one which he had asked her to sing. The incident, trivial as it was, served to arouse his passion. He tore up the song, and threw the pieces in the fire. Then he abruptly left the room.

Pride alone prevented Nina from bursting into tears. With a strong effort she restrained herself, and merely saying: "I am afraid Michael is not well to-night," followed her husband.

She found him writhing on a sofa with his hands before his face. She spoke soothingly to him, but at the sound of her voice his rage was doubled in its intensity. His eyes shone like burning coals. He uttered oaths too blasphemous to be repeated. His lips were damp with a milky foam. The man was mad!

With difficulty they got him to his bedroom. A doctor came and administered sedatives, which soon sent the patient into a quiet sleep. Nina, in spite of remonstrance, insisted on staying with her husband. Shortly afterwards the household retired for the night, and the house itself was buried in darkness.

But see! What is that form shrouded in black, gliding like a ghoul of the night with muffled tread towards the chamber of curtained sleep? Look, it enters! It has a razor in its hand. Horror of horrors! What is that liquid stream?

* * * * *

"Eaton Square tragedy. Verdict. Sentence." Such is the cry of the newspaper boys, who congratulate each other on the business they are doing.

Michael Crosmaduke has been found guilty of attempting to murder his wife Nina, has been declared of unsound mind, and is sentenced to be kept in confinement during Her Majesty's pleasure. On the morning of the tragedy he was found in a raving condition, accusing himself of having murdered his wife. Evidence having been given to the effect that the unfortunate man had been subject to slight attacks of insanity, though his friends considered that this was merely the result of his being a deep student.

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CHAPTER IV.

The Madman's Story.

The ravings of my miserable mind have become less constant. I am no longer tortured with those feelings of remorse which made my brain a seething pandemonium of frantic rage, which made me an inhuman monster.

I am no longer haunted by that dread apparition which used to arise before me as an avenging angel to bear witness to my crime.

And yet now that I take up my pen in my moments of peace I am at a loss how to explain the experiences which I have gone through. How can I, a prisoner in a madhouse, expect to be believed? My words will be considered the insane ramblings of a disorganised brain.

I have suffered worse agony than was ever suffered by man. Have I atoned for my sin? Have I been forgiven?

Have you, Nina—you, the pure woman whom I murdered in my rage—vouchsafed to me your pardon? I believe you have. It is the only consolation left to me in this life; may I not be robbed of it!

I have seen Nina. I have seen her constantly.

It is at night that she comes to me, when, with wasted strength and feverish brain, I lie down exhausted, yet unable to speak. Then it is that her spirit comes and gazes upon me, bringing with it an atmosphere of sacred calm.

How can I express my joy when she first came to me with pity written on her countenance? I gazed on the radiant beauty of her countenance, and I know that she is happy.

Let me now, while it is fresh in my memory, state how her beatific vision came to me.

It was in the middle of the night, and I was lying thinking of her, when a strange light appeared at the foot of my bed. At first it was indistinct, and seemed to me like the faint light of a moonbeam trying to pierce through the gloom of my bedchamber. But as I raised myself on my elbow, and gazed steadfastly at it, it assumed a more definite shape. I could see the vague outline of a woman's form gradually emerge from a halo of radiance.

I called to her by name, and as I called her features became distinct.

She visits me now every night, and on each succeeding night her form becomes more and more distinct before my vision. As the welcome light which heralds her approach steals into my room, there now comes with it a sweet fragrance like the scent of many herbs, which fills my senses with an undefinable joy.

But I have had more wonderful experiences, experiences which I never dreamt could have happened to mortal man. The eternal part of me has left its earthly prison of clay and wandered forth in sweet unison with Nina's angelic spirit. It has been my lot to know the true communion of souls, and to journey with my own and only beloved through the realms of infinite space.

It happened thus: After appearing to me as usual, she beckoned me to her. For a moment I felt the most excruciating pain. My heart beat against my ribs with such force that I thought they would be broken. My forehead was struck as if by an electric battery. Then all power left my limbs, and I was unconscious.

How long I remained in this state I cannot tell, but when I awoke I was by Nina's side, in the midst of that

halo of radiance in which she always appeared to me. I looked at my bed, and saw there my own body apparently plunged in deep sleep. I could feel Nina's subtle influence. My spirit seemed to merge in hers, and together we were wafted gently from my room.

The agony of that night will haunt me throughout all eternity. My first recollection after leaving my prison chamber, was to find myself in my uncle's house in Eaton Square. Nina drew me with her into the very room where we had last lain. There, before my spiritual gaze, I saw our bodies buried in deep sleep.

How can I depict what followed? Yet the picture is burnt into my brain.

Look! The door opens softly, and the figure of a woman muffled in black approaches the bed. From beneath her wrapper she draws her hand, and in it a razor. Now I see her features. In her eyes there is the cruelty of the man-devouring tigress, glittering more sharply than the steel in her hand. I recognise her now.

She is my cousin Maud. She bends down. With lightning fingers she bares my angel's throat. Another second and the deed is done. The life blood spurts forth, and I see no more.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Poole Solves the Mystery.

I have been asked to put down on paper all that I know about the Eaton Square tragedy. The task is a difficult one, since the publication of my knowledge proves me to be a selfish schemer.

Some years ago I committed the egregious blunder of placing myself in the power of Colonel Eldridge. From that time I was his slave, and hated him accordingly.

Four years ago he told me he would do me a good turn. He said that he had a ward, and would make me his tutor, with a salary of five hundred a year, until he should come of age. The ward was Michael Crosmaduke, who was then seventeen. He further stated that Michael had a peculiar temper, and that there was hereditary madness of a homicidal nature in his family. My only other instructions were that we should travel on the Continent, and visit him in London once in every six months. Our expenses were limited to a thousand a year.

That was the information which I received from Colonel Eldridge. I gained some more information from Somerset House, which made me suspect that my employer was a fraudulent trustee.

From the time I was first engaged as Michael's tutor to the time of his marriage with Nina Perugia, my suspicions were so constantly confirmed that they became

convictions. Except for the short visits twice a year, the Colonel objected to our being in England, which made me conclude that he did not wish the identity of his nephew to be known. During these visits he hinted to me, with the conversational *finesse* of which he is a perfect master, that he should like me to encourage his nephew in any vices which might be latent in him.

I should mention here that during the whole time that Michael was under my charge I made it my special object to gain all the information in my power in regard to diseases of the brain, more especially those that are hereditary. I had Michael before me as a subject for practical study.

My pupil had no vices, but he had very expensive tastes, and as my own tastes are, and always have been, expensive, we were often short of money. Colonel Eldridge refused to supply us with more than he had agreed to do, so I had to seek the assistance of a shrewd and amiable gentleman named Nock. Being shrewd, he understood our position; being amiable he lent us, or rather Michael, money. I believe he has never repented either his shrewdness or his amiability.

What I have already written is only a prologue to the Eaton Square tragedy. I will come to that at once, only pausing to say that I had never discovered as yet any certain symptoms of insanity in Michael.

After the marriage I came with Michael, his bride, and Luigi Perugia to London, where I left them at the Grand Hotel, as I had to go into the country on business of my own. The next news I heard of Michael was that he was accused of attempting to murder his wife during a fit of insanity.

I was present and gave evidence at his trial, when he was sentenced to be kept in confinement during Her Majesty's pleasure.

Shortly after the trial I had an interview with Colonel Eldridge. At first he abused me, but I told him that I knew him to be a fraudulent trustee. The result of the interview was that I became his private secretary, and went to live at his house in Eaton Square.

By this time Nina had recovered from the wounds which she had received upon the night of the tragedy. Her grief for the fate of her husband was intense, and she often assured me that she was convinced that it was not by his hand the deed had been committed.

I did all I could to comfort her, partly because I was fond of her, and partly because Colonel Eldridge relied on her friendship for me to save him from any awkward questions in regard to the trusteeship.

She was living quietly with her brother in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, and I was a constant visitor at the house. On several occasions she told me that she had seen her husband in her dreams, and asked me if I believed in the theosophical doctrine of the communion of spirits.

At the time I considered these visions to be merely the outcome of an over-excited brain. Although Colonel Eldridge was in the habit of calling to see her two or three times a week, Maud Eldridge always refused to come with him. She openly declared that she hated the sight of Nina's face.

I was exceedingly anxious to see Michael Crosmaduke at the asylum, and at last, through the medium of the Home Office, obtained a permit to see him. During my visit he told me the story of his dream, which has been already narrated, adding that, since he knew he was innocent, he was perfectly happy. He sent various messages to Nina, and in my opinion was as sane as he ever was in his life.

A fact which had already puzzled me now made me suspicious—namely, that if Michael Crosmaduke had committed the deed of which he was accused, he must have committed it after his fit of rage had subsided. After he had been put into bed, he had not spoken a word to his wife. That he should have attempted to kill her in cold blood, seemed to me to be most improbable.

Who, then, was the guilty party? According to Michael Crosmaduke's story, it must have been Maud Eldridge.

I will say nothing about any feelings of friendship that I possessed, and do still possess, for my old pupil. I will only say that it was to my interest to prove his innocence, and Maud Eldridge's guilt. From a worldly point of view, he would be a better friend to me than Colonel Eldridge.

My experience of life has taught me that, in the majority of instances, the whole truth is of more use than a half confidence. Acting on this experience, I informed my friend, solicitor, and money-lender, Mr. Nock, of my suspicions, and asked him for his advice. He could only suggest one scheme, which I immediately put into execution.

The scheme was to extort a confession from Maud Eldridge, while she was under hypnotic influence. We took into our confidence the most successful professor of hypnotism of the day, and I persuaded Colonel Eldridge to invite him to give an entertainment in Eaton Square. I also persuaded Maud to allow herself to be hypnotised.

I must ask my readers to imagine the consternation which her confession created. When she awoke, and learnt what she had said, she fled to her bedroom and poisoned herself with prussic acid, which she must have purchased with the intention of using in case of discovery by any chance.

On the following morning Colonel Eldridge left London, and has not been heard of since. I have been suitably rewarded by having the management of the Crosmaduke estates.

Michael Crosmaduke has, of course, been released. When I see the happiness of my old pupil and Nina, I wonder at the good which my own selfishness has caused.

P. North.

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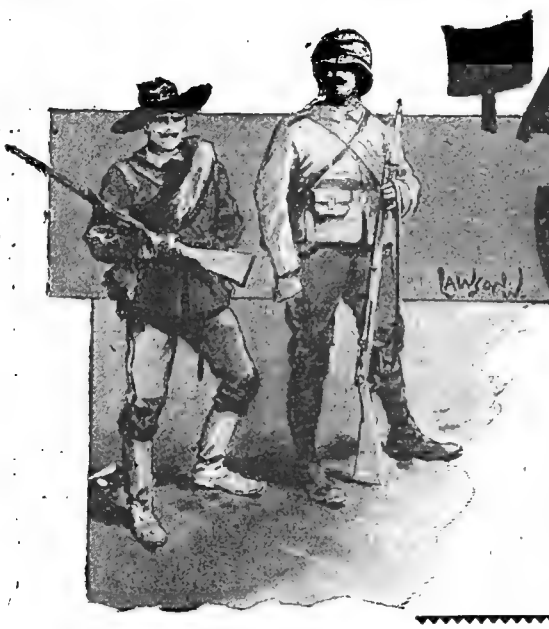

THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

CHAPTER XXI. (*continued*).

Brave at heart and with the true instincts of a soldier, the Emperor caught at once the nature of the situation, and a fierce anger convulsed him at the spectacle of some of his own picked Berlin troops staggering so quickly beneath the blows of the enemy.

For his troops, drilled with all the art and care of martinet perfection, had for the most part never been in actual warfare. And the sudden dash of the English Reconnaissance Corps, persistent, terrible, and not to be denied, had caused one of those brief panics from which even experienced veterans are not absolutely safe.

Sword in hand and regardless of danger, the Emperor rode among his retreating soldiers, and in furious language bade them take their stand again. Then, with a sudden change of purpose, rushed to a battery stationed hard by which commanded the English advance.

"They are at your mercy!" he shouted to the major in command. "Beat them back! It is a disgrace that a handful of men should withstand the whole German army!"

Glancing round, he saw a gun which remained silent. The British fire had decimated this section of the battery, and the quartermaster lay dead upon the truck. Without hesitation or thought, but yielding to a wild impulse, he sprang off his horse, and surrounded by amazed artillery officers who rushed up, trained the twelve-pounder unaided and with his own hand and fired it into the opposing infantry already pressing hard upon the retreating Berliners.

"Your Majesty!" cried a General officer, who dashed up at this extraordinary spectacle. "For Heaven's sake, remount! You are in the most frightful danger. What shall we say if any harm befall you?"

And so saying, he literally forced the excited Emperor to remount his charger, and without a moment's delay took him off to a safer spot.

It was well he did so. Shamed and encouraged by the brave action of their Emperor, the gunners, although pelted by a fierce fire, stood with desperate courage to their guns, and, as the enemy came more clearly into vision, began to take a surer aim.

In a few minutes a deadly hail of shrapnel opened upon the British Infantry. Already was the Berlin Regiment taking heart again, and thus checked in front and commanded by a frightful fire, severe damage was inflicted upon the brave attackers.

Colonel Stewart, of the Seaforth Highlanders, turned pale for a second as he realised that the fury of victory had carried his men into too precipitate an advance, and that the battery opening upon him would possibly render retreat hideously disastrous. The mist, too, was beginning to clear, and he saw that the whole corps, as it fell back, as arranged, upon the British lines, would be followed by a fire which might reduce the force to rags.

His plan of action was speedily formed.

Rising in his stirrups he yelled to the regiment in ringing tones which could be heard loud above the rattle of musketry: "The Mackenzies have got their chance. We must take these guns. Fix swords! Charge!"

His final order broke into a veritable shriek. He was answered by a wild Scottish cheer, and, without a moment's hesitation, the brave Highlanders rushed full pelt upon the German battery.

It was a terrible, if an heroic sight. The dauntless infantry, heedless of the fierce fire that played on them, closed up again and again as their ranks became thinned, and dashed imperturbable and resistless up the slight slope towards the deadly guns.

It was one of these rare acts which lift and ennoble War, and make it sublime. The Seaforth Highlanders knew well that they were giving their lives for their fellows. If they reached the guns and silenced their fire, it would be probably only by their own self-destruction. And they did not pause to heed this terrible thought, but with devoted heroism bore down upon the foe.

Step by step they pursued their way, falling in dozens as they advanced; but their fierce persistence had its effect. Mere courage could not withstand the grim, awful determination of men who knew they were doomed, and cared not for their safety. Bursting through the wavering ranks of a German infantry regiment which sprang forward to the support of the artillery, the noble remnant of the famous regiment cut their way to the battery, and in a second one of the guns was spiked.

It seemed unlikely that more than this could be effected. Dashing up from all sides, reinforcements from the foe arrived and threatened to surround them, and make of the battery a deadly carnage heap. The Highlanders held

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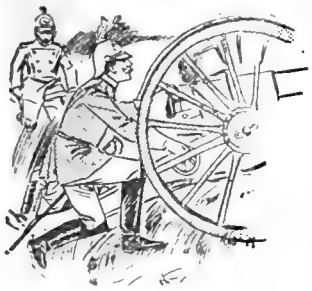
their ground nobly, and with superb defiance withstood a wild attack before which almost any regiment might be pardoned for staggering.

But now, in what seemed the last moments of a deed seldom parallelled, there came a new and welcome shout.



Fired it into the opposing infantry.

"Old England for ever!" was the cry borne upon their ears.

Amid the confusion it was difficult at first to realise what had happened.

Stationed some distance away, and engaged in assisting in the retreat and covering the retiring infantry, the 1st Dragoons had witnessed from afar the heroic effort of the Seaforth Highlanders.

Nor did Colonel Tomkinson wait to consider.

Forming his men, he bade them charge. Along the enemy's lines swept this magnificent regiment of cavalry, impetuous and terrible.

Tearing through opposing obstacles, and by sheer weight and valour beating aside the press of opposition, the Dragoons dashed like a whirlwind up the slope and cut into the swaying mass surrounding the gallant Highlanders.

So sudden, so magnificent, so resistless was the charge, that the whole enemy yielded, half beaten back, and half magnetised. In a second the remaining guns were rudely harnessed to some of the cavalry horses by the Dragoons. The Seaforth thus cloaked were soon enabled to rapidly retire towards their lines, leaving the foe amazed and wildly wroth, not only at the escape of their quarry, but at the loss of their guns.

From his post away to the right the Emperor William had seen the magnificent charge of the British cavalry, and in pride of soldiership could not refrain from an involuntary cry of angry admiration.

Mistaking his emotion, General Krudsdel, who was at his side, observed:

"Ah, those English! They have the devil's own luck."

His amazement was unbounded when his Emperor, turning fiercely round, said in indignant tones:

"Silence, sir! What do you mean by your insinuation? Do you know that those are the 1st Dragoons? I am their Colonel."

And turning his back upon his astounded General, he rode off.

Within two hours the masterly skill of General Fraser had carried the Reconnaissance Corps to safety. It had effected his mission.

Thousands of Germans lay dead upon the field. But this was not the worst.

For the enemy had commenced to know and to fear the might of the British Tommy.

The Emperor's precept had been terribly borne out in practice.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Unexpected Happens.

When Admiral Mahan quitted the shores of the United States he was fully convinced that the American nation and their political leaders held widely different views on the struggle in Europe. The sympathies of nearly every class of the community were entirely with the Mother Country, whilst the Washington bureaucrats thought they were playing at high politics by adopting a cautious and neutral attitude.

The Admiral also knew that as soon as the Sovereign People had made its opinions clearly known the politicians would "climb down."

Individually he was strongly on the side of Great Britain. Not only was her quarrel just—thus claiming his support as an upright and conscientious man of the world—but there was also a personal phase. As a sailor he quivered with the hope that when the United States navy came into action it might be to aid the flag of Nelson against any assailant, however powerful or ambitious.

Yet, he had his definite orders, and these must be obeyed against all quixotic inclinations, even though the performance of his duty should lead to the destruction of the ideals of his whole active life.

As a non-combatant, however, he was in no way prevented from offering his best wishes to Vice-Admiral James E. Erskine when he encountered the British North-American fleet on its way to the English Channel.

The two fleets sighted each other in mid-ocean on the fifth morning after Admiral Mahan had left New York, and when they came more closely together the American commander accepted the British Admiral's invitation to lunch, the two being, of course, already well acquainted.

"Why are you returning to Europe?" inquired Admiral Mahan when they were conversing together, apart from the other officers, on the quarter-deck of the *Crescent*.

"I really don't know," said Erskine. "It seemed to me that our home forces had absolutely crumpled up all the enemy's ships except the cruisers that escaped through Gib. and reached Brest in safety, and these could easily be held tight there by a section of the Channel Fleet. Under such conditions it would surely have been better to leave me in Canadian waters. But my instructions were imperative. I was to start forthwith, and call at Queenstown for further orders, keeping an eye open on the way for any stray French or German ships which might have designs on our commerce."

"It is curious, certainly."

"Yes," was the thoughtful rejoinder, "so curious that it suggests a tremendous possibility."

"And what is that?" said the American.

"Russia may be about to join the coalition against us."

Admiral Mahan uttered a prolonged whistle to give vent to his amazement—a proceeding so unlike the regulation deportment of a British officer of similar rank that a passing marine nearly followed his example.

"Snakes!" he said at last, "I wish that little business had been fixed up before I left New York."

It was now the turn of the Englishman to be puzzled. "Why?" he inquired.

"Because," came the emphatic reply, "my people are feeling real mean as it is about France and Germany rounding on you in such an underhanded way, but if they knew that Russia was also taking a hand in the game, I should not be sailing alongside you to-day by accident, but by design."

The brave Highlanders rushed upon the German battery.

"Are you quite sure of that?" said the other eagerly. "I must say that I despaired of help from the States when I read the speeches of your prominent men and the articles of your chief newspapers."

"I guess I know the American people pretty well by this time," was Admiral Mahan's confident answer, "and you must not forget that the people pay for both the men and the papers. They can have a fresh tune whenever they like, you bet."

Under existing circumstances the two officers agreed that

it was inadvisable they should long continue in company, and the American Commander decided upon a more southerly course, as he was in no very urgent hurry to reach his destination, which, by the way, was the British Channel, where he could coal and be out of the way of the belligerents for the time, whilst within easy call of the American Minister in London.

Before parting the crews of both fleets cheered each other heartily. The American bands played "Rule Britannia," and the British bands struck up "Hail Columbia," following on with "Yankee Doodle."

Not to be outdone, and by way of a final message, the flagship of the U.S. fleet sent across the waters the strains of "Auld Lang Syne."

Thus, with mutual good wishes, the fleets of England and the United States slowly diverged in their journey eastwards, and ere the light failed over the sea they were hull down on the horizon from each other.

Vice-Admiral Erskine had a fairly smart lot of ships under his flag. They were not heavy vessels, it is true, and unable to encounter battleships of the latest type, but still, had such put in an appearance, there would, to use the classic expression of a gunner's mate on the *Crescent*, have been "a devil of a row." In addition to four recently built first-class cruisers, the *Sutlej*, *Jumna*, *Narbudda*, and *Jhelum*, there were the usual members of the North-American fleet, namely, the *Buzzard*, *Canada*, *Cleopatra*, *Magicienne*, *Mohawk*, *Partridge*, *Pelican*, *Tartar*, and *Tourmaline*—fourteen ships, all fast and all well armed with quick-firing guns.

On the morning after they had said good-bye to Admiral Mahan, the British fleet discerned the smoke of a distant assemblage of ships slightly northward of their course, and Admiral Erskine at once took measures to be prepared for all eventualities.

It was well that he did so.

Within half-an-hour's time he had counted eighteen French and German cruisers. Evidently these were the vessels that had slipped through Gibralter and remained so long inactive in the harbour at Brest. Their mission now was to cut off all communication between Canada and England, and they regarded themselves as fully equal to the task of capturing the British North-American fleet when they encountered it.

Nevertheless Vice-Admiral von Grüdenau didn't expect to meet his opponent in mid-Atlantic.

In fact he had been caught napping in every sense of the word, and Admiral Erskine was quick to realise that he was probably far more prepared for an immediate engagement than was the enemy. Anyhow, he resolved to act upon the assumption, and whilst the French and German ships commenced to make distance for effective manœuvring the British Admiral flew this signal: "Pick out your opponent and go straight for him."

The battle commenced at 8.10 a.m., by the *Crescent* firing at the German flagship *Augusta*, and within one hour and fifteen minutes four British ships and nine of the allied fleet had sunk, whilst the remainder of the enemy had struck their colours.

A Cunard steamship, the *Lucania*, had come up just as the opposing fleets were closing together, and one of her passengers thus described the fight in a letter to a friend:

"Excitement on board was almost at the point of madness as we saw the two masses of ships quietly nearing each other, without the slightest sound being audible over the intervening stretch of water. It was a positive relief to the nerves when the British flagship sent a shell whizzing at the enemy, who promptly replied.

"From that moment we certainly could not complain of want of noise. Not only was there the banging and clashing of the big guns and the rattle of small arms, but the constant clang of the projectiles against the armoured portions of the ships reminded one for all the world of the hammering and clattering in a shipbuilding yard.

"This, however, was not ship-making, but ship-breaking. In a little while we saw a vessel pitch on to her nose and go straight down. We believed her colours were French, but could not be sure.

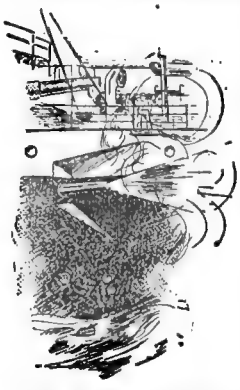
"Someone appealed to the Captain, a Scotchman, and asked him which side was winning. The Captain glared awfully at him and said; 'Are ye daft, man, tae ask sic a drivelling idiot's question'? Of course, the Captain, like the rest of us, hoped there would be only one end to it.

"At last it was all over. The noise ceased, the smoke rolled away from the face of the water, and we could see the Union Jack floating proudly, whilst not another flag was in sight.

"Then we cheered like mad, and the women began to cry for sheer relief. Captain Macpherson nearly burst the foghorn and steamwhistle before he gave the order to resume our course to New York."

The victory, though complete, had been dearly purchased. Several of the British ships were as badly damaged as those of the enemy which still floated, and nearly all were rendered so unseaworthy that a moderate gale would have endangered their existence.

Admiral Erskine found that over thirty per cent. of his men were killed or wounded, whilst on board the French and German ships the carnage had been terrible, and he had to send one half of his available medical staff to their assistance.



The British flagship sent a shell whizzing at the enemy.

Three at least of the enemy were quite disabled, and the *Crescent*, *Narbudda*, and *Magicienne* had to take them in tow.

By nightfall, the weather fortunately remaining calm, the British commander had succeeded in securing something in the disposition of his crippled fleet, which now commenced to move quietly eastwards, with the prospect of reaching Queenstown in about four days' time.

The night was clear, and the lights of the great company of vessels could consequently be distinguished at a considerable distance.

When, therefore, Commander James E. Tully, of the fast dispatch vessel *Seahorse*, sighted them, he knew that he must risk signalling an enemy and trust to his heels afterwards if the fleet should turn out to be hostile.

He sent up four white rockets followed by a red one and waited anxiously for the reply, with his hand on the engine-room indicator. It came, four red rockets and one white, and he knew to his exceeding joy, that he had fallen in with Erskine's force.

As speedily as possible he was conveyed to the flagship. He handed an Admiralty dispatch to his superior officer, and then, with the quick, comprehensive glance of a sailor, took in the details of the day's proceedings.

Admiral Erskine paled as he read the instructions he had just received.

"Great Heavens!" he cried, "my victory has been as disastrous as a defeat. I suppose you guess the contents of this dispatch, Commander Tully?"

"I am afraid I do, sir," was the answer. "When I left Portsmouth the newspapers stated that although Russia had not definitely declared war the Government feared treachery on her part. A strong Russian fleet had slipped through the Baltic and was last sighted, the day before yesterday, off the north-west of Scotland. The *Surprise* is also looking for you on the southern route, and I might have missed you if I had not fallen in with the American——"

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"Ha," interrupted the Admiral. "Did you tell Mahan your news?"

"It was the first question he asked me after giving me the fullest information with regard to your possible location. He at once inquired if Russia had declared war."

"And what did you say?"

"I thought I was justified, sir, in giving him such news as I possessed."

"Perfectly justified. What did he do then?"

"He informed me of the chance of your meeting the allied fleets, which I see you have done, sir, with splendid effect, and at once, judging by his smoke-stacks, he started for England full speed ahead."

The Admiral gazed hopelessly at the papers in his hands before he said in a broken voice: "My orders are to proceed with all possible haste to the Bristol Channel to intercept a possible Russian attack upon our coal supply, and here I am, in mid-Atlantic, with a practically disabled fleet, hardly making five knots an hour and utterly unfitted to fight half-a-dozen well-handled colliers. Oh, it is cruel, cruel!"

But Erskine was not the man to flinch before difficulties, however insurmountable they might appear.

"Commander Tully," he said with his wonted calm tones of subdued energy, "you must return at once to Valentia and telegraph the facts of the case thence to London. Say that five of my ships can make ten knots, and at that rate we will reach the Bristol Channel. The others are useless, save to act as broken-down convoy to the nine ships I have captured. The other nine French and German cruisers are at the bottom of the Atlantic. If Providence so decrees, the rest of the fleet will in due course reach Queenstown. As a final word—every minute lost in conveying this news to the Admiralty renders the case of England more desperate."

Commander Tully saluted, swung himself over the side of the *Crescent* without waiting for the formality of a ladder, and said as he reached his boat: "Bend to it, my lads. 'Sharp's' the word with the davits, as the ship starts the moment I reach deck."

During four weary days did Admiral Erskine pace the deck of the *Crescent*, whilst his now tiny force crept along at what appeared to be a snail's pace over the vast expanse of the Atlantic.

More than ten knots he did not dare to ask his engineers to make, and it was only by almost superhuman efforts on the part of those devoted officers that even this moderate rate of speed was attained without the ever-threatened breakdown.

During this miserable period of inaction not a vessel was seen save one or two belated cargo-boats travelling eastwards, and from the absence of all outward-bound traffic, the British commander argued the fulfilment of his worst fears—namely, an expected or actual attack upon England by the Russians.

It was an ill task asking the Admiral any questions at this time, yet he achieved wonders in the way of repairs to his damaged ships as they progressed, and by the time they sighted Lundy Island they presented a highly creditable appearance. No one would ever judge by their superficial semblance that they had recently passed the ordeal of a terrific naval engagement.

It was midday on Thursday, May 25th, that the British fleet passed north of Lundy, and it was with a wildly beating heart that Erskine slowly deciphered the message signalled by the lighthouse keeper, who was telephonically connected with the mainland.

And this is what the fluttering little flags tediously spelled out:

"American fleet anchored off Cardiff last night. At daybreak strong Russian fleet passed up Channel to attack Cardiff. Negotiations took place between America and Russian Admirals, and it is believed that American Admiral insists upon delay in Russian attack. Reason not known. Channel Fleet now off Land's End on way from Havre."

Erskine smiled for the first time for four days. In fact, his accustomed good humour returned with avidity to make up for his previous anxiety.

"Mahan is a brick!" he exclaimed. "I might have known he would work off some dodge upon them. Played them up strong, I expect, upon the protection of commerce idea." And he stamped about the quarter-deck with such joyful eagerness the men knew all was right so far, and the wounded turned more comfortably in their berths as the good news permeated through the ship.

Embraced by his sister and his fiancee.

Three hours later the five ships were abreast of the Nash Lights. When the broad reach of the Channel between the Steep Holm Island and Barry began to open up, the British fleet suddenly saw three battleships and four cruisers, flying the Russian colours, coming down Channel, and Erskine at once threw his vessels in line across their path.

Preparations were speedily made for a fight, but when the Russians were some two miles distant they were seen, to the amazement of the British, in view of the disparity of the forces, to stop dead and strike their colours.

This token of unconditional surrender was immediately followed by a signal from the leading battleship: "To avoid useless bloodshed I yield.—Michaelovitch, Grand Duke and Commander-in-Chief."

Such an astounding piece of good luck could hardly be credited by the British Admiral, but by this time his officers were beginning to note through their glasses that the Russians showed many signs of recent severe handling.

It was indeed true that they were wholly unfitted to struggle against an apparently fully equipped foe, although vastly superior in class of ship and weight of armament; yet the wonder of the British officers now became absolute bewilderment. How had this thing happened?

In a few minutes the Russian Grand Duke was tendering his sword to Admiral Erskine.

"We could not fight against a fresh fleet," he said in excellent English. "My ships are practically disabled, and mere floating hospitals."

"Well we are mostly paint and bandages ourselves," said the Englishman.

Michaelovitch, Grand Duke, stamped his foot with rage upon the deck as he glanced round and saw that he had surrendered prematurely to a foe almost as crippled as himself and of such infinitely less relative power.

"You must not take it too much to heart," continued Admiral Erskine, in kindly tones. "You could not have escaped. The Channel Fleet is only six hours behind me."

The Russian tried to find comfort in the fact, but he was nevertheless furious at his own precipitation.

"Who fought you, anyway?" said Erskine.

"That irrepressible Yankee," growled the other. "He first tried to delay my operations and when I refused to fall in with his views formed up his ships between me and the port. I had no alternative but to attack him—with this result."

The agony of the Russian Admiral was such that Erskine could not seek to comfort him.

The Russian ships then put about and the whole compact moved slowly on towards Cardiff.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

Cheap Steam Coal.

"Oh, Irene, what awful news is this!"

"What?" cried Lady Irene Vyne, starting to her feet with passionate intensity.

"Russia has declared war. The paper says that the information is authorised by the Foreign Office, so it must be true."

The Russian delegate found himself confronted by the Harbour-Master.

"Is that all? My dear Ethel, I thought something had happened to Teddy," and the pale-faced but imperious young beauty sank back into her chair with an expression of absolute relief at the insignificance of the intelligence.

"But, Irene, surely this is serious enough! They say here that an attack in force may be expected anywhere on the coast at any moment. Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Liverpool, are all anxious, as a Russian fleet has entered the North Sea, and its whereabouts is unknown, whilst the Russian Ambassador is leaving at once. The Channel Fleet is at Havre, and is ordered back for the defence of the South Coast. The two special squadrons are recalled from Kiel and Stralsund. It is awfully dangerous for the troops, is it not?" and Ethel Harington pensively dropped the fatal news-sheet and gazed affrightedly at her friend.

"Dearest, how can you think so? Have not our armies beaten the French and Germans every time they have met them? Are they not strongly entrenched with their bases on the sea, upon which no enemy's ship floats save this new ally? If we must face the world in arms let us do it with the same spirit we have displayed so far. Let the Russians send their ships. We will repair them and re-christen them in our dock-yards." Irene's colour came as she spoke, and a fearless light leaped into her sweet blue eyes.

"I wish I had your courage," said the other. "But then, you know, I never hear from Frank, whilst you have news from Teddy so often."

Irene went and knelt by the side of her companion and tenderly put her arms about her. "Ethel," she said. "If I were told that Teddy was killed, which God forbid should His merciful wisdom so decree, it would break my heart, but I should still rejoice that my country had received the sacrifice. Neither men nor women must think of fear whilst England is in danger."

Tears rose unbidden to the eyes of both girls, and they were silent for a moment. The door was flung open and Major Harington entered, to be impulsively flown at and embraced by his sister and his *fiancée*.

"Oh, Teddy, how did you come?" cried one.

"And when did you come?" said the other.

"But we're so glad you're here."

"We were just crying about your imaginary funeral."

"And Irene said——"

"I'm sure I didn't. You began about the Russians."

Then both together—"Do sit down and tell us all about it."

Major Harington, looking browner and thinner than when they had last met, did sit down, but promptly jumped up and kissed them both again. He seemed inclined to repeat the process, but they seized him and held him in an easy chair, while Irene said:

"If you don't tell us the news at once, you will get no tea."

Thus coerced, he explained that Lord Roberts had sent General Massy back to see hurriedly to some final details concerning the forwarding of the Third French Expedition, and that he, Harington, had accompanied the General as his A.D.C.

Great excitement and uncertainty prevailed at the War Office owing to the expected Russian attack. Lord Wolseley had delayed the departure of the first detachment of the Third Army Corps until it was known whether or not their services would be required to repel an invasion. It was not certain that transports accompanied the Russian fleet—that remained to be seen.

"As for me," concluded Harington, "I have exactly forty minutes' leave, and here I am."

"You're looking splendid," cried his sister.

"I must tell my father and mother you are here," said Irene. "They will be delighted to see you. But before they come I want to give you something." She leant over him, took his face between her hands, and kissed him.

This action, simple enough though it was, yet had an element of strangeness in its manner.

"That is very nice of you," said Harington. "But may I ask the reason of this special sign of favour?"

"Because I am proud of you, Teddy. If you had been killed whilst taking those guns, I should have worn a wedding-ring all my life as a lasting token of my faithfulness to the memory of the man who was to have been my husband."

Lady Irene Vyne was thoroughbred right through.

* * * *

On the morning of May 25th the early risers among the people of Cardiff were eating their breakfast and discussing the possible whereabouts of the Russian fleet, when a thrill of pleasureable excitement passed rapidly from the pier-head to the town at the news that a strong American flotilla of six battleships and eleven cruisers had anchored in the roads.

Councillor Ramsdale was the Mayor for that year, and notwithstanding the anxieties and duties entailed by the war, he never forgot the hospitable traditions of his dignified position.

He was soon astir and hastily convened a meeting of the General Purposes Committee to provide for the due entertainment of the officers of a friendly Power, as the hourly increasing sympathy of the United States had caused a keen sentiment of grateful kindliness to spring forth in all parts of the kingdom.

As it transpired, the committee, which met at ten o'clock, had a very different question for consideration.

"Steam coal will be cheap to-morrow."

Admiral Mahan at once sent the first lieutenant of the *Minneapolis* ashore to ascertain if there were any United State vessels in dock and preparing for a voyage.

There were two bound for New York and Philadelphia and loading with tin-plates in the Roath Dock.

"When will you be ready for sea?" said the naval officer to the two captains, whom he found at the shipping-office of the Board of Trade.

"To-night's tide," said one.

"Midday to-morrow," replied the other.

"I guess you'd better sail in company to-morrow," said the officer. "You'd feel kinder lonesome otherwise. The United States want those tin-plates particular bad?" he went on.

"Particular," assented one captain.

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"It'll be a cruel thing for Philadelphia if that white metal ain't delivered by June 6th," said his companion.

"And I suppose that six-inch shells and shrapnel won't hurry up the loading?"

"You can stand on me, Admiral; my ship won't take any more tin under them unfavourable conditions."

"Commodore, there'll be a scarcity of tinplates in Philadelphia for a considerable period."

The lieutenant carefully noted the names of the vessels, the captains, and the owners, with the details of their charter-parties, and returned to the flagship.

Meanwhile Cardiff, and in a brief space the rest of the country, became strangely convulsed by the arrival of successive telegrams and telephonic messages announcing the passing of an unknown fleet of warships—flying no colours, but believed to be Russian—by Lundy Island, by the Mumbles Lighthouse, by Nash point, and, finally, by Barry.

At 10.30 a.m. the sound of cannon boomed over the sea.

Twenty Russian ships—at last their ensigns were hoisted—were rapidly steaming between the Steep and Flat Holm Islands and Lavernock Point on the mainland, and the miserable little batteries at those places were feebly thundering forth defiance to the enemy.

But the Russians knew that the weapons, mostly dating from the Crimean war, did not even cover the few intervening miles of the Channel, dropping their projectiles harmlessly into the sea, and leaving a broad central passage untouched. They did not even trouble to reply.

At eleven o'clock they hove to opposite the town, but somewhat to one side of, and farther away than the American ships.

The Mayor, and several members of the Corporation hurried to the pier office in order to learn the fate of the port at the earliest moment, and the local volunteers—such few as were left after the drafts for foreign service had been met—and some companies of the auxiliary army, formed up in the same locality.

Lord Wolseley telegraphed that Sir Richard Harrison and staff were travelling by special train to Cardiff, and that 100,000 men with 200 guns, would be in the town by four o'clock. The Channel Fleet, too, had started under forced draught from Portsmouth, where it had arrived from Havre.

The Russians had barely halted before a steam launch rapidly left the *Kronstadt*, and, flying a flag of truce, throbbed its way up the entrance of the channel, finally depositing a magnificent-looking officer and two juniors, attended by a small guard of marines, on the steps at the pierhead.

The Russian delegate found himself confronted by the Harbour-Master when he reached the quay.

"I would have the honour to see the Governor of the city," he smilingly explained, recognising the official by his uniform.

"This way," was the stern answer, and the party marched into the Pier Offices, which were close at hand.

The Mayor stepped forward at once to meet them.

He was pale with emotion, but furious at the thought of the pending horrors for his town and people.

"Well, sir," he said, with all the calmness he could muster, "what is your business?"

The Russian still smiled, and explained, speaking carefully, but most politely:

"The Grand Duke Michaelovitch, admiral in command of the fleet of His Majesty the Tsar, being instructed of destroying your docks and railways, is about to give them the dynamite. Also will he sink all ships in the harbour of you. He desires no evil to unarmed people, and women, and the child, but if any resist he will cannonade the city."

"Tell him, sir," said the Mayor, "that we fear neither him, nor his cannon, nor his master. Armed or unarmed, we defy him. And let me tell you, sir," he went on, with increasing vehemence, "that if you land here again with your men we will improve your English and add a lesson in Welsh!"

The envoy understood sufficient of this forcible speech for his purpose. He bowed most ceremoniously, and was escorted back to his launch by the Harbour-Master, amid the dead silence of the onlookers.

Admiral Mahan.

The Major was the first to break the spell cast upon the assembled leaders of the community by the dread presence of the enemy at the very threshold of the town.

"Come!" he cried. "Let us arm ourselves as best we may. We must, if need be, die in our streets to keep back the enemy until help is at hand."

A German coal-shipper, naturalised by long residence in South Wales, who had joined the group round the Mayor, sneered at the folly of the proceedings.

"Steam coal vill be cheap to-morrow," he said.

The Mayor heard him and turned fiercely upon him.

"Have you any to sell, sauerkraut?" he inquired.

The German was nettled at the nick-name.

"More dan you can buy," he snapped.

"How much, and what's your price?"

"Ten tausend tons at five shillings," cried the Teuton, who knew in the event of bombardment the port would be ruined.

"Here's a cheque for £2,500," said the Mayor, seizing a pen and ink. "Give me in return an undertaking to supply the coal or its market price, whichever you choose, to me or my heirs to-morrow at noon."

The German did not hesitate, the documents were exchanged, and next day at the appointed hour, the shipper, almost on his knees, besought the Mayor to take £5,000, and let him off his contract, as the market price of steam coal, f.o.b., was 16s. per ton.

Admiral Mahan had not been a disinterested spectator of the passage of the Russian launch up the fairway of the channel, and its subsequent return.

He forthwith dispatched to the *Kronstadt* the same officer who had landed at Cardiff in the earlier hours of the day.

When the lieutenant was brought before the Russian commander-in-chief he was laconic.

"Admiral Mahan, of the United States Navy," he said, "instructs me to ask your purpose in visiting British shores."

"I am delighted to explain to such a distinguished officer, who so ably represents a friendly country, that my mission is to destroy this and other ports in Great Britain," was the Grand Duke's answer.

"Russia having declared war against England?"

"Exactly." Michaelovitch, Grand Duke, urbane though he was, resented the interrogator's manner.

"Has notice been given to the United States of your attitude?" went on the lieutenant, quite regardless of the change of tone in the superior person with whom he was conversing.

"I presume so. That is a matter of diplomatic detail to which I have paid no attention."

"There are two American ships in dock here, and they cannot complete loading until to-morrow. They could not arrange otherwise, having received no warning of the outbreak of hostilities between England and Russia. Against a French or German fleet they take their own risk, of course, but in your case and under the circumstances, Admiral Mahan has directed me to ask you to delay your bombardment until these two vessels have loaded and sailed."

The Grand Duke laughed with angry surprise. "Preposterous!" he shouted. "Did anyone ever hear of such

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a childish request?" and he turned to his staff to volubly explain in Russian.

Every man guffawed loudly, but the American sailor surveyed them stolidly, though a slight flush came to his face.

"I have the greatest respect for your famous commander, in whom, as a seaman, I recognise a master, but I fear I cannot extend the same regard for his opinions on international law," said the Russian, who had now recovered his wonted complaisance.

"Admiral Mahan did not send me to seek your opinion of his acquirements," was the calm answer. "I am here to state his unalterable wishes."

"Unalterable wishes!" growled the Grand Duke, again astounded at the language used to him. "You must have misunderstood your commander, sir. Have the goodness to return to him and ask him to send a more intelligent representative—after I have finished my work. I am busy now."

For the first time during the interval the American officer smiled. "I am using my commander's exact words," he said.

"And if I refuse this mad demand," cried the Russian prince, now thoroughly aroused, "what is the alternative?"

"You must first pass through the United States fleet," was the quiet and measured response.

The officer spoke as though he were uttering the merest triviality, but his heart bounded tumultuously as he uttered the fateful words.

"Holy Nicholas! This is too much," shouted Michaelovitch. "Quit my ship, sir, and tell your admiral from me that I give your two ships half-an-hour to clear out of dock, and your fleet the same time to shift its moorings. In thirty minutes I open fire"

The lieutenant saluted and tripped lightly down the gangway to his launch.

When Admiral Mahan heard the result of the interview, his gleaming eyes alone showed the fire that flamed in his soul.

He turned to his flag-lieutenant and said:

"Have all preparations been made according to my directions?"

"All, sir. Every ship noted them and signified their completion."

"Then signal 'Prepare for action.' Ships will follow the flagship at six cable length and take station accordingly."

The United States fleet moved slowly off in the wake of the *Minneapolis*, and when they halted in line in the fairway of the channel they were interposed between the town of Cardiff and the Russian armament.

At one o'clock precisely the Russians deployed for the attack, and the *Kronstadt* signalled:

"I am about to open fire."

"Better wait twenty-four hours," came the reply from the *Minneapolis*.

The answer to this was a shell, which whizzed through the centre of the American line of ships and finally destroyed the remnants of the low-water pier.

Admiral Mahan was equally punctilious. A six-inch shell was sent shrieking past the bows of the *Kronstadt*.

Before it had dropped harmlessly into the sea far away towards the blue coast of Devon, so charmingly silhouetted against the bright summer sky, the two fleets were furiously engaged.

Admiral Mahan shouted to the captain of his ship, for an ordinary tone of voice would have been inaudible amidst the roar of the guns:

"If I've got to be hanged on my own quarter-deck I'll have a jolly good fight here first!"

(To be continued.)

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Your Esteemed Inquiry Duly to Hand.

D. S.—About a quarter of the inhabitants of Paris live in apartments.

YANKEE-DOODLE.—The total length of railways in Great Britain is rather more than 21,000 miles. A very good proportion, when you remember that the total area of Great Britain is only 121,000 square miles.

G. G. puts the question: "Who is the greatest Royal traveller?"————I should say the Emperor William of Germany excels in this matter, while the King of the Belgians and the Prince of Wales might come next.

P. P.—Portugal is the ancient Lusitania. Its present name is derived from Porto Callo, the original appellation of Oporto. The latter name is the English rendering of O Porto, "The Port."

E. D. W. asks: "What is a 'rote of waves'?"————It is a favourite idea of the fishing and seafaring people of the north-east of Scotland, that in a storm three waves are strong and violent, while the fourth is comparatively weak and less dangerous. This succession they call a "rote of waves."

W. G. S.—Your friend is quite right; there is no mikado. The Emperor of Japan is known as "Tenno Hei-Ka," which means "His Imperial Majesty." Thus the people of Japan address their sovereign in exactly the same manner as do the subjects of the Kaiser. It is true, "Mikado" used at one time to be the title. It has, however, fallen into abeyance for several generations.

D. E. S.—True, the Tsar has some very large estates, one covering over one hundred million of acres, which is, in fact, more than three times the size of England. You must remember, however, that one acre of ground in London is worth more than a hundred million acres in the Russian steppes. The Tsar's biggest estate only brings him in £95,000 a year, while land in London has been sold for as much as £1,000 a square yard.

TOM TUCKER is about to start on an ocean voyage for the first time in his life. He writes to ask me if I can tell him of any way by which he can find out whether he is likely to suffer from sea-sickness or not.————An easy way to put the matter to a test is to stand before an ordinary mirror that turns in its frame, and to let someone move it slowly and slightly at first, and gradually growing faster while you look at your own reflection. If you feel no effect whatever from it, the chances are that you will be able to stand an ordinary sea-voyage without any qualm.

T.—Probably the most ancient pulpit in England still in use is that in Lutterworth Church, in which Wycliff preached. It remains intact.

DOC.—The highest death rate seems to be one of Russia's records. At Krasnovarsk it reaches the appalling figure of 100 per 1,000, that is, one in every ten. It is 70 per 1,000 in several districts, and even in Moscow, among the lower classes, it occasionally reaches 44 per 1,000. These figures refer to a week when the death rate in London was 14·5 per 1,000.

B. B.—Boiling alive, as a punishment, is hardly dead yet, if we may believe the statement that came on good authority from Persia in the early part of the present decade. A tax-collector, who had been found guilty of appropriating State funds, was done to death in that manner. This was for the double purpose of punishing him and encouraging the others to be honest.

SCHOOLBOY writes to ask if such a person as "John Gilpin of 'credit and renown' ever really existed."————Certainly he did, and he lived in a cottage at Thornton Heath, near Croydon, which is still standing, although, of course, it is in a very dilapidated condition, the roof being thickly covered with stout ivy roots, and a rich crop of weeds grows on the soil which a period of three hundred years has deposited on the tiles.

A CYCLING FRIEND gave me a useful little tip the other day, which I now repeat for the benefit of my cycling readers. It is this. If you are unfortunate enough to get a punctured tyre when riding in the country miles away from anywhere, and find yourself out of rubber solution, an effective cement for repairing can be made with a teaspoonful of glycerine and a gill of glue, both of which ingredients can be purchased at any village shop.

B. V.—Of the rulers of great states who have been done to death during the past thirty years or so, three were Presidents. The United States have lost two—Lincoln, shot in a theatre by Booth in 1865, and Garfield, mortally wounded by Guiteau in 1881. The assassination of President Carnot of France is still fresh in our memories. Other rulers were the following: In 1874 the Sultan Abdul Aziz of Turkey "died suddenly"; it is generally understood that his journey to the Mohammedan paradise was accelerated by the application of a pair of scissors to a vein, but details are, of course, wanting. In 1881, the Tsar Alexander of Russia, grandfather of the present ruler, was horribly mutilated by the explosion of a bomb. The Empress of Austria does not, strictly speaking, come under the head of "ruler."

S. L.—The London Spas had a national reputation at one time. There is only one left now; it is not far from High Street, Streatham. It belongs to a firm of dairy farmers, who sell the water at one penny a glass. The water has a slight taste of sulphur, and is strongly impregnated with iron.

SUB.—What may fairly be termed a subterranean city exists in Galicia, in Austrian Poland. It is called the City of the Salt Mines, has a population of more than a thousand men, women, and children, many of whom have never seen the light of day, and possesses a town hall, a church, and a theatre. In the church are several statues, carved from rock salt.

H. E.—The Jewish congregation of Worms, in Germany, is of extreme antiquity. It is claimed that the community was established before the destruction of the Second Temple. On one occasion the members of this ancient body, when petitioning their monarch for more liberal treatment, pleaded that their ancestors took no part in the Crucifixion, as they had been settled in Worms long before the birth of Christ.

E M. writes: "I am pining to make a record of some kind—easily. I am going out to Tongaland, in the Western Pacific, and I shall take my bicycle; in that way I shall make a record—I shall be the first to introduce the wheel there."————You are a little late, E. M. The first bicycle was introduced into Tonga last year; this was followed by several others, and on the occasion of the king's birthday there was actually a bicycle race. Some of the natives are taking very kindly to it.

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A Doctor writes:

(The original can be seen at the Company's Offices.)

Gentlemen,—After using your "Koko" for over six months, I must acknowledge its superiority over any other dressings for the hair which I have tried. It keeps the head perfectly cool, and it *does* eradicate dandriff, and gives the hair a fine, glossy appearance. The medical treatment of dandriff may be summed up in six words—viz., "Keep the head saturated with oil." No doubt this is efficient; but if we adopt this method, the head becomes dirty, for the simple reason that all moving particles are caught and retained by the oil; and, again, bed linen is rendered disgusting by being stained. Now, your "Koko" possesses none of these disadvantages, and it is equally, if not more, effectual. It is for this reason that I prefer it to any other dressing. Since first trying it, I have used no other, and have great pleasure in recommending it to my friends and patients. I send you this little note merely to let you know how well pleased I am with your preparation.

The Late Mrs. E. Lynn Linton,

The Celebrated Authoress, writes:

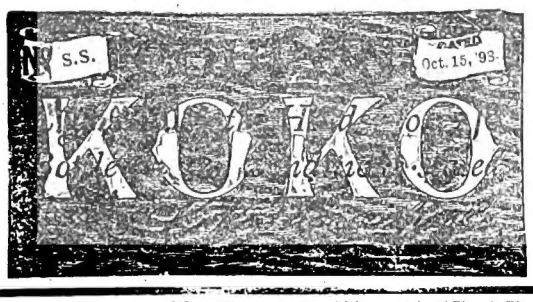
Broughton House, Malvern. Dear Sirs,—I have used your "Koko" now since June last, and I have not only stopped the falling out, which had been excessive after a severe illness, but I have an entirely new growth of hair, while the old hair is longer. As I am not a young woman, but an old one, I think this is a convincing test of the value of your preparation."

ROYAL TESTIMONIAL.

Berlin
Alsenstrasse
Feb 25th 1896.

"Koko" for the hair, is the best dressing I know. It keeps the head cool, promotes growth, and is in every way excellent.

Princess Hohenlohe
Oehringen



SPECIAL OFFER TO THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET TRIED "KOKO."

A 4/6 TRIAL BOTTLE FOR 2/-

Any person forwarding this Coupon and P.O. for Two Shillings and Five Stamps to pay postage, package, &c., will receive immediately for trial, by Parcel Post, under cover, prepaid, One regular 12-oz. Bottle of KOKO for the Hair, the price of which is 4/6, provided it is ordered within ten days from the date of this offer. In no case will more than one bottle be sent for the use of the same person on this coupon, as we make the offer solely for trial, knowing it creates a demand when once used; and this large bottle gives it a fair trial. We find it better to thus practically give away one bottle to make a customer than to spend large amounts in advertising. Any person into whose hands this offer comes may avail themselves of it. Address all orders with Coupon to:

KOKO-MARICOPAS CO. Ltd., 16 Bevis Marks, London.

Orders may be sent with this Coupon after the expiration of date, provided we are then issuing these trial bottle Coupons, and if we are not, the money will be returned. This Coupon will be received at 16 Bevis Marks, E.C., or 233 Regent Street, London, W., and 2s. only will be required when presented personally.

Koko is sold by all Chemists and Stores at 2/6 and 4/6 per Bottle.